

# African Bird Club

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Bulletin of the African Bird Club

Vol 5 No 2 September 1998

Identification of  
Malagasy *Accipiters*

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Blue Pigeons

---

Echo Parakeet  
conservation

---

Monteiro's and  
Green-breasted  
Bush-shrikes

---

Black Parrot  
field studies

---

Ovambo  
Sparrowhawk

---

Problem pipits

---

Collared Nightjar  
feeding behaviour

---

Mt. Cameroon

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# African Bird Club

## The African Bird Club aims to:

- provide a worldwide focus for African ornithology
- encourage an interest in the conservation of the birds of the region
- liaise with and promote the work of existing regional societies
- publish a twice-yearly colour bulletin
- encourage observers to visit lesser known areas of the region
- encourage observers to actively search for globally threatened and near-threatened species
- develop a Conservation Research Fund

Registered Charity No 1053920

### ABC Web site

<http://www.africanbirdclub.org>

## ABC Council

Mark Andrews, Phil Atkinson (Chairman), Keith Betton, Jacquie Bridges (Membership Secretary), Mark Cocker, Stan Davies, Jon Gibbons (Treasurer), John Fanshawe, Lincoln Fishpool, Moira Hargreaves, Peter Headland, Rob Lucking, Vicki Lucking, Duncan Macdonald, Bill Quantrill (Secretary), Rowena Quantrill (Sales Officer), Geoff Randall (Vice-Chairman), Tony Stones and Alan Wilkinson.

**President:** *Martin Woodcock*

## Bulletin Editorial Team

Guy Kirwan (Managing Editor), Mark Andrews, Phil Atkinson, Mark Cocker, Ron Demey, Lincoln Fishpool, Peter Lack, Rob Lucking, Rodney Martins, Roger Safford, Tony Stones and Richard Webb.

## Membership of the ABC

Membership of the ABC is open to all and costs, per annum, UK£15 *Individual (Africa & Europe)*, UK£17 *Individual (Rest of the World)*, UK£18 *Family (Africa & Europe)*, UK£20 *Family (Rest of the World)*, UK£8 *Student (Africa & Europe)*, UK£10 *Student (Rest of the World)*, UK£25 *Libraries/Institutions*, UK£25 minimum *Supporting Member*, or UK£300 *Life Member*. To join or for further details please write to the Membership Secretary, African Bird Club, c/o BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA, UK.

## The Bulletin of the African Bird Club

The *Bulletin of the ABC* provides a forum for news, letters, notices, recent publications, preliminary expedition results, reviews and preliminary or interim publication of studies on African birds by contributors from all parts of the world. Publication of interim results in the *Bulletin of the ABC* does not

preclude publication of final results as journal papers either by the ABC or elsewhere. No material should, however, be submitted simultaneously to the *Bulletin of the ABC* and to any other publication.

## Notes for Contributors

The ABC welcomes original contributions on all aspects of the birds of Africa. Africa is here defined as the area covered by Collar, N.J. & Stuart, S.N. 1985. *Threatened birds of Africa and related islands: the ICBP/IUCN Red Data Book*, Part 1. Cambridge: International Council for Bird Preservation, namely continental Africa, Indian Ocean islands west of 80°E, eg Madagascar, the Mascarene Islands and Socotra; Atlantic Ocean islands on or east of the mid-Atlantic ridge, eg the Tristan da Cunha group, the Azores and the Canaries.

Contributions will be accepted subject to editing and refereeing by independent referees, where appropriate. The material published is divided into *Papers*, *Short Notes*, *News & Comment*, *Discoveries*, *Reviews*, *Literature Gleanings*, *Recent Reports* and *Letters*. The Editorial Team will be happy to advise authors on the acceptability of material at draft stage if desired.

### Submissions

Two copies of contributions should be submitted. Typewritten manuscripts should have double-spaced lines, on one side of the paper only, with wide margins all round. Clear handwritten manuscripts are also acceptable. All submissions will be acknowledged.

Contributions will be accepted in English or French: French summaries, as well as table and figure captions, will be printed for all major papers published in English, and vice versa. Those submitting major papers should supply a summary for translation

into English, or French, as appropriate.

If possible, please submit your contribution on floppy disk and state computer (eg IBM compatible PC, Macintosh) and word-processing package (eg Word, WordPerfect) used: please note that Amstrad PCW disks are not acceptable.

When you send your contribution on disk, please do not key anything in ALL CAPS (ie with the CAPS LOCK key depressed) unless the combination always occurs in that form (eg 'USA'). Do not use the carriage return key at the end of lines, and do not right justify the margins. When formatting tables use one tab, and not spaces, between each column. Please always send two hard (printed) copies in addition.

### Preferred names

With the current instability over worldwide lists of bird names, authors are requested to follow those used in *Birds of Africa* Vols 1–5. For species not yet covered, please use appropriate regional handbooks and checklists eg Roberts for Southern Africa, Britton for East Africa. Deviation from such works should be noted and the reasons given. The Editorial Team will keep abreast of changes in nomenclature and when an agreed list of African names is available, will consider switching to follow it.

Unless a sketch map is provided as part of the article, the names of places should, if possible, follow those on standard or readily available maps.

*(continued inside back cover...)*

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## Front cover plate

Green-breasted *Malaconotus gladiator* (upper) and Monteiro's Bush-shrikes *M. monteiri* (lower) by Mark Andrews

## Illustrations

Mark Andrews and Craig Robson

## Photographs

Jeff Blincow, Arndt Hampe, Simon Harrop, Frank Hawkins, Ákos Hivekovics, Robert Lucking, Pete Morris, H. Mueller/VIREO, R. Safford, Volker Salewski, A. Skerrett, Russell Thorstrom

# Club News



## ABC membership

By late May 1998, the Club had 1,109 paid-up members, a new record for this point in the year. The Club now has members in 64 different countries, including 28 in Africa. However, there are probably many potential members who have still not heard about the Club as well as c450 people who have been members at some stage in the five years since the Club was launched, but who have allowed their membership to lapse. We have set ourselves a target of reaching 2,000 members by the end of the year 2000. To achieve this, we need the support of all our current members. If you know of any lapsed members, or indeed any potential new members, please encourage them to subscribe by showing them this bulletin.

If your membership subscription is due for renewal this year you should find a payment form enclosed with this bulletin. The form should also indicate if your subscription is paid automatically by direct debit. Please renew as soon as possible and save the Club the expense of having to send out reminders later. To save postage costs, subscription payments will not be acknowledged unless a receipt is specifically requested.

If you are uncertain about your membership status, or have other membership related queries—please write to Bill Quantrill at the Club address or by e-mail: wquantrill@msn.com.

## Supported membership scheme

The supporting members scheme is a key part of the Club's strategy of encouraging the spread of knowledge and understanding of birds as widely as possible throughout Africa. The scheme enables African nationals, who would not otherwise have the resources to join, to become members of the Club. The scheme is funded by Supporting Members who pay a minimum of UK£25 to cover their own membership and the subscription of at least one African member. The money they contribute over and above their own subscription is placed in a special fund which is used to cover the membership expenses of African members who they

may have nominated, or who have been nominated by other Club members.

Although we have suggested a minimum figure of UK£25 to become a Supporting Member, any contribution is welcome. All members of the Club, even if they do not feel able to become Supporting Members themselves, are invited to nominate candidates for supported memberships. Candidates should be nationals of an African country, with a genuine interest (not necessarily scientific or academic) in birds but without the resources to become members in their own right. Our supported membership at present includes post-graduate students, teachers, national park guides and civil servants, but there is no reason why persons from almost any background should not be considered. Africans who think they may qualify are very welcome to put their own names forward, supported by a suitable letter of recommendation from someone such as their employer, teacher or an office-holder in a local wildlife organisation.

## ABC autumn meetings

On Saturday 26 September 1998, ABC will hold a joint meeting with the Norfolk Bird Club in Blakeney Village Hall, Norfolk. The doors open at 19.30 hr when refreshments and ABC sales items will be available along with a licensed bar. Entry is free to ABC members. At 20.00 hr Rob Lucking, Assistant Conservation Officer, RSPB East Anglia Office, will present an illustrated talk 'Birds and conservation in the Seychelles'.

A joint ABC/Wiltshire Ornithological Society Meeting will be held at the Crown Centre, Devizes, on Wednesday 8 October, beginning at 19.30 hr. Lincoln Fishpool, BirdLife International's Co-ordinator of the Important Bird Areas programme in Africa, will give an illustrated talk on the programme.

## 1999 London meeting and AGM

The Club's 1999 London Meeting and AGM will be held at the School of Oriental and African Studies, Russell Square, on Saturday 6 March 1999. Details of the speakers, the AGM programme and how to reach the venue will be posted to members early in 1999.

In order to save on the considerable postal costs involved, Council proposes to send the AGM programme only to members based in the UK. The minutes of the AGM are published in the following bulletin. Overseas members who wish to receive the AGM agenda should notify the Club secretary via the Club's address.

## 1998 London meeting and AGM

This year's London meeting and AGM was successfully staged at the School of Oriental and African Studies, Russell Square, London. Members were treated to some excellent illustrated presentations, by Guy Eldridge on Tanzania and Alan Greensmith on Ethiopia. The last presentation was a particularly passionate account of the conservation of White-winged Flufftail *Sarothrura ayresii* by Deon Coetzee, the South African ABC representative.

Full details of the AGM, held in the early afternoon, are published elsewhere in the Bulletin. Several Council members stood down at the AGM, including Gary Allport, Peter Lack, Barbara Woodcock and Martin Woodcock. A special presentation was made to Martin on behalf of ABC to mark his invaluable contribution to the Club since its inception.

## ABC says farewell to Martin and Barbara Woodcock

After six years of service for ABC, the Club says farewell to two of its most valued officers—Barbara and Martin Woodcock. Both have been involved since 1993, helping during the early years with the Club's foundation, when Martin was also invited to become the first Chairman.

It was very much a case of when you need a job doing, ask a busy man. Martin was already deeply involved in producing all the artwork for the multi-volume *Birds of Africa*—a task with which he is still engaged. In addition, he has produced the plates for two new important national avifaunas—*The Birds of Liberia* and *The Birds of Somalia*—and for Frank Lambert's monograph—*Pittas and Broadbills*—all published by Pica Press. For three years he was also on the Council of the Society of Wildlife Artists.

Despite these responsibilities, not to mention his family commitments, Martin attended nearly all the Club's Council and public meetings, chaired all the AGMs and was central to the organisation of the ABC stand at the annual Rutland Bird Fair. Martin's personal profile in world ornithology has given the Club a valuable platform to appeal to an international audience. We are delighted that he will continue this in an ambassadorial role as the Club's first President.

He would be the first to admit that he could never have taken on this variety of tasks without the support of Barbara, who has also been a key Council member. She has ploughed enormous effort into organising sales stands at ABC events, especially at the Rutland Bird Fair. She planned the catering for many public meetings and also hosted several Council meetings. Both Martin and Barbara will be sorely missed but we are delighted that Phil Atkinson has agreed to become the new ABC Chair.

### Founder Council members retire

Gary Allport and Peter Lack, two of ABC's original launch committee and founder Council members, retired from Council this spring. Both played important roles in shaping the Club during the early days and ploughed a great deal of effort into production of the first bulletins. For the last five years Peter Lack's keen eye for detail has also been an enormous asset in the final preparations of each bulletin, and Peter has made a further contribution in singlehandedly collating and writing the Supplements to the Bulletins. This has involved a detailed survey of most current ornithological literature—a thankless but invaluable task which he will continue to perform. For their many important contributions to ABC we thank them both.

*Contributed by Mark Cocker*

### ABC Representative Scheme

The following is the current list of ABC Representatives:

**Australia:** Alan McBride, PO Box 190, Newport Beach, NSW 2106. Fax: 2 9973 2306. E-mail: mcbird@zip.com.au.

**Belgium:** Paul van Daele, Kazemattenstraat 30, 9000 Gent. Tel/Fax: 9 223 6948. E-mail: pvdaele@uia.ua.ac.be.

**Botswana:** Chris Brewster, Matshekege Hill School, Private Bag 24, Bobonong. Tel: 819272. Fax: 819544.

**Cameroon:** O'Kah Ebwekoh Monya, Mount Cameroon Project, PO Box 437, Limbe.

**Denmark:** Lars Dinesen, Sjallandsgade 37, 3 tv., 2200 Copenhagen N. Tel/Fax: 35 36 71 64. E-mail: regulus@inet.uni-c.dk.

**Egypt:** Sherif and Mindy Baha El Din, 3 Abdalla El Katib St. Apt. 3, Dokki, Cairo. Tel/Fax: 3608160. E-mail: 103257.1554@compuserve.com.

**Ethiopia:** Ato Yilma Dellelegn and Ato Mengistu Wondafrash, Ethiopian IBA Programme, Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society, PO Box 60074, Addis Ababa.

**France:** Bob and Françoise Dowsett, 12 rue des Lavandes, Ganges, F - 34190. E-mail: Dowsett@aol.com.

**Finland:** Annika Forsten, Hantverkareg. 14 D 9, FIN-20100 bo. Tel: 40 5150510. E-mail: aforsten@aton.abo.fi.

**Gabon:** Patrice Christy, BP 2240, Libreville, Gabon. Fax: c/o ECOFAC, 775534.

**Ghana:** Samuel Kofi Nyame, Ghana Wildlife Society, PO Box 13252, Accra.

**Hungary:** Ákos Hívekóvics, 10 Zrínyi Street, H - 8756 Nagyrecse. E-mail: falco@nt.ktg.gcu.hu.

**Italy:** Giuseppe Micali, Via savona 71, Milano MI 1-20144. E-mail: GMicali@USCCMAIL.bms.com.

**Kenya:** Colin Jackson, c/o Dept of Ornithology, National Museum of Kenya, PO Box 49658, Nairobi. E-mail: CJ-Jacko@bigfoot.com.

**Madagascar:** Frank Hawkins, World Wide Fund for Nature, BP 738, Antananarivo 101. Tel: 2 34885 (work), 2 31622 (home). E-mail: mesite@bow.dts.mg.

**Namibia:** Chris Hines, PO Box 22527, Windhoek.

**São Tomé and Príncipe:** Angus Gascoigne, CP 289, São Tomé. Fax: 23912 23406.

**Seychelles:** Adrian Skerrett, Shipping House, PO Box 336, Victoria, Mahé. Tel: 322709. Fax: 322978. E-mail: maheship@seychelles.net. Or 106352.771@compuserve.com.

**South Africa:** Deon Coetzee, PO Box 782937, Sandton, 2146. Fax: 011 884 2739. Tel: 082 490 1212. Steve Evans, PO Box 505, Ngodwana, 1209. Tel: 734 4973.

**Tanzania:** Maurus Msuha, PO Box 70919, Dar es Salaam.

**The Gambia:** Clive Barlow, The Atlantic Hotel, PO Box 296, Banjul. Fax: 227861.

**Uganda:** Prof. Derek Pomeroy, Makerere University Institute of the

Environment and Natural Resources, PO Box 7298, Kampala.  
**USA (West coast):** Joe Thompson, 4070 Sea View Avenue, Los Angeles, California 90065. E-mail: Jcthom1956@aol.com.

**Zambia:** Pete Leonard, Kafue Fisheries, Box 37940, Lusaka. Tel: 032 30128. Fax: 032 30707 E-mail: pleonard@zamnet.zm.

**Zimbabwe:** John Paxton, Ornithological Association of Zimbabwe, PO Box CY161, Causeway, Zimbabwe. Fax: 2634 794614. E-mail: birds@harare.iafrica.com.

The ABC Representative scheme aims to support existing members by providing a local point of contact in their region, for example, to answer queries to the Club, to solicit submissions for the bulletin, and possibly to arrange meetings for local members. Existing ABC members can contact their local Representative in the first instance with queries relating to the Club.

ABC Representatives help to recruit new members in their region, for example, by distributing ABC posters and arranging local advertising. In Africa, ABC Representatives help to identify opportunities to invest the ABC Conservation Fund and nominate candidates for the supported membership scheme.

The Club aims to appoint further ABC Representatives. If you are interested in supporting and promoting ABC in your region, please contact the Club at our postal address or contact our Representative scheme coordinator Stan Davies directly by e-mail: StanDavies@compuserve.com.

### ABC Corporate Sponsorship

Under the terms of the Corporate Sponsorship scheme a minimum payment of UK£300 entitles a sponsor to benefits under the scheme for a five-year period. Corporate sponsors are entitled to a full page advertisement in two bulletins during the five years and can also use the Club's corporate sponsorship logo in adverts and stationery. Contributions under the scheme are allocated directly to the ABC Conservation Fund. Any company or individual with enquiries or suggestions concerning the scheme should write to Moira Hargreaves at the Club address.

### ABC sales items

The following items are currently available from ABC Sales.

1. ABC sweatshirt featuring an embroidered ABC logo and 'African

- Bird Club. Working for Birds in Africa', green, black, or navy. Sizes: small, medium, large, extra-large and extra extra-large: UK£20.
2. ABC Polo shirt featuring an embroidered ABC logo and 'African Bird Club. Working for Birds in Africa', forest green. Sizes: small, medium, large and extra-large: UK£12.50.
  3. ABC T-shirt featuring African Rollers by Mark Andrews, white. Sizes: medium, large, extra large and extra-extra large: UK£11.
  4. ABC T-shirt featuring Turacos, white. Sizes: extra large only: UK£9.
  5. ABC T-shirt featuring an Egyptian Plover by Martin Woodcock, white. Sizes: medium only: UK£10.
  6. ABC caps featuring an embroidered ABC logo, black, bottle green, red, maroon, and navy: UK£7.
  7. ABC caps featuring printed ABC logo, grey: UK£7.
  8. ABC enamel badge featuring a Slender-billed Curlew design: UK£1.
  9. ABC car and telescope stickers: UK£1.
  10. Embroidered sew-on badge, featuring ABC logo: UK£4.
  11. ABC bone-china mugs, two designs by Martin Woodcock, Carmine Bee-eater and Golden-breasted Starlings: UK£7 each or UK£12 a pair.
  12. ABC pen printed with 'African Bird Club' and ABC logo: UK£0.50.
  13. ABC pencil printed with 'African Bird Club' and ABC logo: UK£0.25.
  14. White-winged Apalis A4 colour print by Nik Borrow from *Bull. ABC* 2.2: signed and numbered limited edition of 50 at £UK10; also available unsigned at UK£5.50.
  15. Nightjar A4 colour prints by Martin Woodcock from *Bull. ABC* 2.2: one print illustrates Mountain and Rwenzori Nightjars, the second depicts Black-shouldered and Fiery-necked Nightjars: UK£3.50 each.
  16. Pair of Nightjar A4 colour prints by Martin Woodcock, mounted: UK£15 each.
  17. Locally designed cards on hand-made paper, produced by the paper making co-operative of the BirdLife International-supported Kilum Mountain Forest Project in Cameroon. A selection of 5 cards in a hand-woven wallet: UK£5.
  18. *Bull. ABC*, volume 1, 1994, number 1 and 2: UK£5 each.
  19. *Bull. ABC*, volume 2, 1995, number 1 and 2: UK£6 each.
  20. *Bull. ABC*, volume 3, 1996, number 1 and 2: UK£6 each.
  21. *Bull. ABC*, volume 4, 1997, number 1 and 2: UK£7 each.
  22. Cameroon Trip Report, Dec 1994–Jan 1995 by Richard Webb: UK£6.
  23. Cameroon Trip Report, Mar–Apr 1997 by Jon Hornbuckle: UK£4.
  24. Cape Verde Trip Report, March 1996 by Theo Bakker and Klaas van Dijk: UK£6.50.
  25. Ethiopia Trip Report, Oct–Nov 1996 by Jon Hornbuckle: UK£4.
  26. Birding Ghana, Feb 1996 by Mindy and Sherif Baha El Din: UK£6.50.
  27. Ghana Trip Report, Jan–Feb 1997 by Simon Platt. 35 pages: UK£4.
  28. Kenya Trip Report, Feb–Mar 1995 by Mike Hunter and Graham Speight: UK£8.
  29. Madagascar and the Comores, Oct–Nov 1995 by Jon Hornbuckle: UK£4.
  30. Madagascar, Nov–Dec 1997 by Mike Hunter *et al.*: UK£4.
  31. Malawi, March 1997 by Jon Hornbuckle: UK£3.
  32. Namibia and the Cape, Nov 1994 by Jon Hornbuckle: UK£4.
  33. Eastern South Africa and Zimbabwe, March 1997 by Jon Hornbuckle: UK£5.
  34. Voyage Naturaliste au Cape Provinces d'Afrique du Sud, Sep–Oct 1997 par Georges et Mireille Oliosio: UK£6.
  35. Usambara Mountains, Tanzania, Jan–Feb 1996 by Eddie Williams: UK£4.50.
  36. Uganda Trip Report, Jun–Aug 1995 by Henk Hendriks: UK£6.50.
  37. Birdwatch Zimbabwe, 1991, by Derek Solomon and Jacko Williams: UK£7.

Postage and packing: please send UK£1 for each UK order, and UK£2 for each overseas surface mail order. For overseas airmail please add UK£1 for each item ordered.

Orders: payments should be made in pounds sterling by cheque/postal order (payable to African Bird Club) or credit card. Full credit card details are required, please specify: Visa, Access, Mastercard or Eurocard; card number; cardholder's name (as it appears on card); cardholder's address; expiry date; cardholder's signature; and amount payable. Please be sure to specify your name and address and the full details of your order including quantity, with size and colour where applicable.

Please send your order to African Bird Club, c/o BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girtton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA, UK.


### Trip reports needed

We would like to remind members that we are keen to collect and distribute African trip reports on your behalf as part of our information service. Please write to Rowena Quantrill at the Club address for details of distribution arrangements.

### ABC in *Alula*

An article introducing the Club, illustrated with colour photographs and a colour painting of Udzungwa Forest Partridge *Xenoperdix udzungwensis* by Martin Woodcock, was published by the Finnish (but English language) quarterly magazine *Alula* earlier this year (vol. 4 no.1). This issue also contains articles on Ethiopia, again with many colour photographs, and East African field guides. For more information about *Alula* contact: P O Box 85, FIN-02271 Espoo, Finland. Subscriptions cost: FIM 170 / 180 (Europe surface / air mail); FIM 200 / 210 (outside Europe). Payment by credit card.

### Acknowledgements

We are grateful to BirdLife International for the use of their offices as a mailing address, Alcedo Publishing of Colorado Springs, USA, and Crowes of Norfolk, UK, for their assistance in producing the bulletin. 

We extend our apologies to Jim Enticott—Western Cape Birding and Pelagics, for publishing the incorrect email address in *Bull. ABC* 5 (1). The correct email address is: cthomas@iafrica.com

### 1999 London meeting and AGM

The Club's 1999 London Meeting and AGM will be held at the School of Oriental and African Studies, Russell Square, London on Saturday 6 March 1999. Details of the speakers, the AGM programme and how to reach the venue will be posted to members early in 1999.

# Minutes of the Fourth AGM of the African Bird Club

held on 7 March 1998 at the School of Oriental and African Studies,  
Russell Square, London at 14.00 hr

## Present

The following members registered their attendance at the meeting:

Richard Allison, Mark Andrews, John Archer, Phil Atkinson, David Barker, Roy Barkes, Samson Bayu, Keith Betton, Duncan Brooks, Gerry and Enid Burman, Richard Butler, D R Calder, R A Cheke, P C Cherry, Mark Cocker, J P Darch, Simon Davidson, Martin Davies, Mike Dawson, A J G de Silva Wijeyeratne, S Ecclestone, M I Evans, Lincoln Fishpool, Simon Fogg, Nick Gardner, Neil Gartshore, F M Gauntlett, Brian Gee, Jon Gibbons, Tony Gibbs, B Goodwin, Alan Greensmith, David Griffin, John Hammick, Moira and Roy Hargreaves, Vicki Harley, Stephen Harrington, Frank Hawkins, Peter Headland, Christopher Helm, David Hennessy, Roger Higman, Jon Holt, Diana Housley, Nigel Jarman, R J Jeffers, Michael Kings, Ann Lawson, Russell Leavett, Simon Levene, Rob and Vicki Lucking, Clive Mann, Rod Martins, John Mason, Mr and Mrs A Mason, Tony Morris, D A Murdoch, Anne Nason, Ronald Orenstein, David Porter, Bill and Rowena Quantrill, Geoff Randall, Nigel Redman, Mr and Mrs A G Ross, B W Rowlands, Yvonne Savidge, Andrew Self, P J Sellar, A W Seymour, Brian Sharkey, Phil Shaw, Liz Smith, E F G Smith, M P Stanyer, Tony Stones, B R Sykes, J R Tarlton, Don Taylor, Rae Taylor, Anne Thain, A J Todd, John Walder, Frank Walsh, Richard Webb, Alan Wilkinson, Keith Wills, Barbara and Martin Woodcock, and Barry Wright.

## Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Jacquie Bridges, Mr and Mrs A J Holcombe, Colin Humpage, Duncan Macdonald, Paul Salt, Bob Scott and Andrew Ward.

## Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the third AGM held on 8 March 1997 were taken as read and approved unanimously.

## Matters arising from the minutes

There were no matters arising.

## Report of the Council for 1997

In introducing his report, copies of which had been distributed at the meeting, the Chairman drew attention to the substantial number of new members who had been recruited during the year. This increase in membership had been partly offset by the 132 people who had not renewed their membership in 1997. The Club had conducted a survey which had shown that the main reason for non-renewal was the absence of any

plans to visit Africa in the immediate future. No respondents had given dissatisfaction with the Club or the Bulletin as their reason for not renewing. The Chairman paid tribute to three Council members: Gary Allport, Peter Lack and Barbara Woodcock, who were standing down following association with the Club since its early days, and welcomed the new members who were standing for election.

## African Bird Club—summary statement of accounts at 31 December 1997

### Income and Expenditure Account—year to 31 December 1997

1996		1997
	Income	
13402	Subscriptions	14453
3074	Sales Advertising and other revenue	2632
<u>1741</u>	Donations and sponsorship	<u>1791</u>
18217	<b>Total Income</b>	18876
	<b>Less:</b>	
14297	Bulletin costs—printing and postage	10591
4170	General expenses—stationery, telephone, meeting costs etc.	3766
1059	Finance costs—depreciation, bank charges, accountancy	925
<u>800</u>	Conservation awards	<u>1305</u>
20326	<b>Total Expenses</b>	<u>16587</u>
(2109)	<b>Surplus/(Deficit) carried forward</b>	2289

### Balance Sheet at 31 December 1997

1996		1997
	<b>Fixed Assets</b>	
903	Equipment	813
	<b>Current Assets</b>	
3136	Stock of goods for resale	3332
1000	Prepayments/Deposits	795
<u>14104</u>	Balances at Bank and Building Society	<u>20763</u>
18240		<u>24890</u>
	<b>Less: Current Liabilities</b>	
4439	Subscriptions paid in advance	7968
3792	Life Memberships	4488
<u>177</u>	Sundry creditor	<u>177</u>
8408		<u>12679</u>
<u>9832</u>	<b>Current Assets less Current Liabilities</b>	<u>12211</u>
10735	<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<u>13024</u>
	<b>Represented by:</b>	
	<b>Accumulated Fund</b>	
12844	Brought forward 1.1.97	10735
<u>(2109)</u>	Income and Expenditure Account	<u>2289</u>
10735		<u>13024*</u>

\*At the end of 1997 a sum of £8000 was set aside out of accumulated income for the Conservation Fund

### **Presentation of the Accounts for 1997 and Treasurer's report**

Presenting the Accounts, the Treasurer said they showed a very satisfactory position. The surplus of £2,289 carried forward had been achieved even after writing off nearly £1,000 of Bulletin stocks and making payments of over £1,300 on Conservation Awards. The accounts did not include the balances held in the Club's accounts in Zimbabwe and South Africa—any member who would like details of these accounts should contact the Treasurer.

There being no questions, the Accounts were approved unanimously.

### **Election of Council**

The following were elected to form the African Bird Club Council for 1998:

Mark Andrews, Phil Atkinson, Keith Betton, Jacque Bridges, Mark Cocker,

Stan Davies, Jon Gibbons, John Fanshawe, Lincoln Fishpool, Moira Hargreaves, Peter Headland, Rob Lucking, Vicki Lucking, Duncan Macdonald, Bill Quantrill, Rowena Quantrill, Geoff Randall, Tony Stones, and Alan Wilkinson.

### **Election of Executive Officers**

The following were elected as Executive Officers of the Club for 1998:

Chairman:	Phil Atkinson
Vice-Chairman:	Geoff Randall
Secretary:	Bill Quantrill
Treasurer:	Jon Gibbons.

After the election of the new Executive Officers, Mark Cocker, on behalf of the Council and members of the Club, spoke in tribute to the retiring Chairman, Martin Woodcock, and presented him with a print by Katrina Cook in recognition of the immense contribution he had made to the Club since its

foundation. It was announced that Council had invited the retiring Chairman to become the Club's first President and that he had accepted.


### **Appointment of Auditor**

Colin Humpage FCA was elected as Auditor for 1998.

### **Any Other Business**

Yvonne Savidge asked whether it would be possible to arrange a meeting of the Club in Devon at some stage. Tony Stones (Meetings Officer) undertook to look into the possibility.

It was agreed that stick-on identification labels would be provided at future meetings.

There being no other business, the Chairman declared the meeting closed at 14.30 hr. 

## **African Bird Club *Conservation Fund***

The ABC Conservation Fund has been set up to support small conservation-based projects in Africa. The Club has allocated £2,000 (\$3,000) for 1998 and aims to encourage as wide a range of ideas as possible. Many different types of projects will be considered as long as there is a clear conservation benefit. These could include:

- survey and research into African birds
- production of guides to the common birds of a country in local languages
- educational materials
- leaflets / posters with conservation messages
- interpretation boards at nature reserves

- design and production of T-shirts with local / international conservation slogans
- other ideas will be considered

Applications can be made at any time to the Club address. The maximum grant in any one case will be £500 but it is likely to be smaller. Requests should be made by letter and should include the following details:

- plan of proposed project and why it is important
- budget
- amount requested from the fund
- details of how payment can be made

As the fund is small, restrictions will apply:

- applicants must be African nationals
- the requested grant from ABC should be a substantial part of the proposed budget ie contributions to very large projects will not be considered
- projects that reach a wide audience will be favoured

Applications should be sent to:

ABC Conservation Fund,  
African Bird Club,  
c/o BirdLife International,  
Wellbrook Court,  
Girton Road,  
Cambridge CB3 0NA,  
UK.



# Africa Round-up



## General

### Developments in swamphen taxonomy...

A recent paper in the *Dutch Birding Trends in Systematics* series suggests that the current taxonomy of the genus *Porphyrio* is significantly outdated. By applying the Phylogenetic Species Concept (PSC) to the six subspecies groups of *Porphyrio porphyrio* (as defined by Roselaar in *Birds of the Western Palearctic*), the author—George Sangster—arrives at the conclusion that an interim taxonomy which recognises these six groups as distinct species, based on their qualitative morphological differences, is required. These are: *porphyrio* (confined to the western Mediterranean, including Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia), *madagascariensis* (Nile Valley and delta and elsewhere in Africa south of the Sahara), *poliocephalus* (southern Asia west to southern Turkey and including the western shores of the Caspian Sea), *pulverulentus* (endemic to the Philippines), *indicus* (South-east Asia including the Greater Sunda Islands) and *melanotus* (Indonesia south and east to New Zealand). The three first-named are all monotypic, but the latter three groups contain multiple subspecies. For the present, Sangster advocates that they be retained as single-species taxa, but future studies, especially amongst the *melanotus* group may yield other species-level taxa. Thus, under the PSC and including Allen's Gallinule *P. alleni*, Africa possesses three species of *Porphyrio*.

Source: *Dutch Birding* 20, pp 13–22



Purple Gallinule *Porphyrio porphyrio*  
by Craig Robson

### ...and *Acrocephalus* and *Hippolais* warblers

Continuing molecular phylogeny studies of Palearctic birds are providing a number of dramatic and highly interesting results. The latest developments concern relationships among *Hippolais* and *Acrocephalus* warblers. Using mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) sequencing, Leisler *et al.* have re-evaluated this subject and reached some striking conclusions. Most remarkable is the fact that Booted *H. caligata* and Olivaceous Warblers *H. pallida* were found to cluster amongst the large plain reed warblers, and henceforth are best regarded as *Acrocephalus* warblers. Other results of interest to birders in Africa concern the taxonomy of African Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus baeticatus*. The molecular findings suggest that the taxon *avicenniae*, which occurs in north-east Africa and the Arabian Peninsula is best regarded as a full species—Mangrove Reed Warbler—given its closer relationship to European Reed Warbler *A. scirpaceus* than to *baeticatus*. Furthermore, the two described subspecies of European Reed Warbler—*A. s. scirpaceus* and *A. s. fuscus*—were also found not to be sister taxa and should be regarded as separate species. Given its breeding distribution, Caspian Reed Warbler appears a not wholly inappropriate vernacular name for *fuscus* which may breed as far south as Egypt's Nile Delta. In reviewing Leisler and colleagues' work, George Sangster (writing in *Dutch Birding*) remarks that much remains to be done concerning reed warbler taxonomy, and phylogenetic studies of as yet unsampled taxa may yield further surprises and radical new insights.

Sources: *Dutch Birding* 19, pp 294–300;  
*J. Ornithol.* 138, pp 469–496

### New WIWO reports available

The Working Group International for Waterbird & Wetland Research (WIWO) has recently published six new reports based on its ongoing research. Of these, three are of interest to African ornithologists. WIWO Report 39 is devoted to Waders in Guinea-Bissau in October 1992–May 1993 (price Dfl 25); Report 54 discusses waterbirds in Kneiss,

Tunisia in February 1994 (Dfl 25); and Report 58 is, like others in the series, devoted to Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* roosts and other European songbirds, this time in Ghana in December 1996–January 1997 (Dfl 15). These and other WIWO reports can be ordered by paying the sales prices indicated above, plus Dfl 15 for each separate order from outside the Netherlands, directly into postal giro account 2.666.009 or ABN-AMRO bank account 57.02.16.613 of Stichting WIWO, Fetha 23, 3633 CT Vreeland, Netherlands or by sending cash or a Eurocheque to the same address.

Contributed by Ekko C. Smith

### Biodiversity at the edge

Conservationists should, perhaps, be devoting more attention to ecotones—those areas along the fringes of rainforests where the trees give way to savannah—suggests recent research which points to the possibility that the forces increasing biodiversity may lie in such areas. Studies conducted in and around six West African forests on the Little Greenbul *Andropadus virens* have demonstrated that individuals recorded on the edges of forest are significantly different from those found in the forest interior, despite interbreeding between the two. New species may, therefore, arise, despite limited gene flow. In the past such ecotones have been largely ignored by conservationists in favour of forest interior habitats, although it is fringe habitats which are the first to bear the brunt of burning, wood gathering and grazing activities. This new research may force conservationists to turn their attention to preserving those habitats which may be the birthplace of biodiversity.

Source: *Oryx* 32, p 94

### Southern Africa

#### Southern African Important Bird Areas—an update

The documentation phase of the southern African portion of the Important Bird Areas (IBA) programme is nearing completion. Ninety-four sites have been found to fulfil global IBA criteria in South Africa, with 17 in

Namibia and nine in Botswana. It appears that South Africa is probably the single most important country in the continent for sheer numbers of IBAs. Despite the country's strong protected-area system, a significant number (over 32%) of South African IBAs receive no formal conservation or legal protection. Most of these sites are in Free State or Northern Cape and 40% are within the grassland biome. Further subdivision shows that of the unprotected grassland sites, 41% are wetlands and an additional 35% of unprotected IBAs are non-grassland wetlands. These, and other findings, have prompted an ongoing revision of the South African Red Data Book for Birds, which is being undertaken by the Avian Demography Unit on behalf of BirdLife South Africa.

Source: Bird Numbers 7, pp 12–13

### Zambezi workshop

A workshop to discuss 'Sustainable use of the Cahora Bassa Dam and the Zambezi Valley' was held in Mozambique on 29 September–2 October 1997 and involved over 50 scientists, managers and decision makers from southern Africa and elsewhere. Recommendations were made for better management of the dam, which has been in operation since 1995, taking both human and wildlife needs into account, and to gain a Ramsar designation for this important wetland. Since its inception, the dam has been releasing a constant outflow of water, destroying flood season flows and increasing dry season flows downstream with huge ecological and social consequences.

Source: Oryx 32, p 95



Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*  
by Mark Andrews

### Migration tracked by satellite: Greater Spotted Eagle, from Poland to Zambia

A pair of Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga* and their single young were fitted with satellite transmitters on their breeding grounds in Biebrza National Park, north-east Poland, in July 1996.

The young bird, which left the breeding territory a few days after the female but several days before the male, was tracked as far as Albania. The female spent the winter in Chad, whereas the male flew on and crossed the Tanzania/Zambia border on 17 or 18 December and overwintered in Luangwa National Park, Zambia, having travelled 9,270 km. This bird set off on its return journey on 9 March and spent the first night near the border with Tanzania, 414 km from its winter quarters. During the rest of its homeward migration the bird covered up to 350 km per day, reaching Suez after three weeks. In 1997 it again wintered in Zambia and was located less than 500 m from the most precise location of the previous season. This was the first time that Greater Spotted Eagle was proven to winter south of the Equator.

Source: Africa—Birds & Birding  
3 (1), pp 62–68

### Echo Parakeets released in Mauritius

In 1997 three young Echo Parakeets *Psittacula eques* were released into the wild in Mauritius. The 1996–97 breeding season was the most productive in recent years for the wild population which reached its highest numbers since 1972, with a total of 76–87 birds. However, of 21 chicks produced, only three fledged naturally and the other 18 had to be taken into captivity, thereby increasing the captive population to 23 birds. The three released birds were selected from this population and have established well in the wild, venturing 1 km away from the release site within three months.

Source: Oryx 32, pp 95–96

### Spatial organization of large-bird species in Kruger National Park, South Africa

During 1991–1994, A Kemp, G Benn and K Begg plotted sightings and nests of Kori Bustard *Ardeotis kori*, Martial Eagle *Polemaetus bellicosus*, Lappet-faced Vulture *Torgos tracheliotus* and Southern Ground Hornbill *Bucorvus leadbeateri* in Kruger National Park. Additionally vegetation structure throughout the park was assessed visually in 1991–1992. Comparative control data for Southern Ground Hornbill based on annual censuses (from 1982–1994) and nest-site data (from 1966–1996) were also used when comparing positive correlations between different species and different sets of vegetation categories. Nest-sites

showed even stronger correlations. The authors discovered that the same vegetation categories that showed the highest correlations with random sightings of ground hornbills and their nests also had the highest correlations with the more extensive data from aerial census and long-term nest records. It would seem that the method used by the authors for correlating vegetation structure with bird records is predictive, testable and useful to conservation management programmes for sparsely distributed species.

Source: Bird Conservation  
International 8, pp 89–108



Kori Bustard  
*Ardeotis kori* by Mark Andrews

### Natural history notes on the Velvet Asity

Writing in the *Wilson Bulletin*, Richard Prum and Vololontiana Razafindratsita, present detailed observations on the territoriality, vocalizations, display behaviour and nesting cycle of Velvet Asity *Philepitta castanea*. The species is apparently polygynous, with males defending non-resource-based display areas which are distributed as dispersed leks. The authors further discovered that six elaborate display elements are performed by males as part of both intrasexual and intersexual behaviour. Female-plumaged birds act in pairs when nest-building and caring for post-fledging young, although adult males will occasionally visit the nest-site. Prum and Razafindratsita go on to discuss aspects of the species' life-history and moult cycle in a phylogenetic context. Two of the species' displays appear to originate from a common ancestor of the asities as did the delayed plumage maturation found in the male Velvet Asity as well as in other members of the genus. It appears, from these observations, that *P. castanea* belongs with the manakins, cotingas, birds-of-paradise, bowerbirds, and hummingbirds as a phylogenetically independent example of the relationship between diet, parental care and lekking behaviour.

Source: Wilson Bull. 109, pp 370–392

## Mozambique bird atlas progress report

Vincent Parker, writing in the most recent issue of *Bird Numbers*, reports that despite disappointing numbers of returned fieldcards from visiting birders, he is making good progress with the bird atlas for southern Mozambique. Field coverage in this area (defined as Mozambique south of the Save River) has been good—95% of the quarter-degree grid cells had received some coverage with the early summer (September–December) period having received least attention (80%)—and the atlas is expected to appear in late 1998 (atlases for central and northern areas of the country are projected although fieldwork in these regions has not been extensive as yet). One interesting result from the fieldwork undertaken thus far has been the identification of two widely separated populations of the near-endemic Neergard's Sunbird *Nectarinia neergardi*: one restricted to coastal sand forest south of Maputo and the other in tall mixed woodlands north of the Limpopo River. Birders interested in the project can obtain fieldcards from the Avian Demography Unit, Department of Statistical Sciences, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa. Additional information can also be obtained from Vincent Parker or Jose Alves, Endangered Wildlife Trust, Private Bag X11, Parkview 2122, South Africa. Tel: (011) 486-1102. Fax: (011) 486-1506. E-mail: ewtsa@global.com.

Source: *Bird Numbers* 7, p 14

## A specimen record of Lesser Striped Swallow from Madagascar

Michel Deshayes, whilst examining the bird collection at the Museum of Natural History in Geneva, discovered a specimen of Lesser Striped Swallow *Hirundo abyssinica* collected near Lake Alaotra, north-east of Antananarivo in January 1925: the first and only record from Madagascar.

Source: *Bull. Brit. Ornithol. Cl.* 117, p 315



Martial Eagle *Polemaetus bellicosus*  
by Mark Andrews

## Leach's Storm-Petrel breeding confirmed

In an earlier bulletin (*Bull. ABC* 3: 76), we reported the discovery of Leach's Storm-Petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* in October 1995 on Dyer Island, Western Cape Province. Subsequent fieldwork, undertaken by Phil Whittington and his colleagues, has confirmed that the species does indeed breed on the island. Following an abortive visit in March 1996, 19 birds were located in stone walls on Dyer Island in late November 1996. The cavity discovered in 1995 was again occupied and, on this occasion, the bird was found to be incubating a single egg. Further visits were made to Dyer Island on 4 February 1997—when the first nest contained a month-old chick and chicks were heard calling from two other nests—and 17–18 March 1997. By the time of the latter census, the chick had apparently fledged successfully. A wall cavity was again occupied in October 1997. In December of the same year, other offshore islands off the Western Cape were also searched for Leach's Storm-Petrels and the species was heard calling on Dassen Island, where a single bird was found occupying a cavity in a stone water-tank. These observations are the first confirmed breeding record of the species in the southern hemisphere and bring the number of seabirds known to breed in southern Africa to 15.

Source: *Bird Numbers* 7, p 20

## First observations on behaviour and nesting of Madagascar Red Owl

In October 1994, a Madagascar Red Owl *Tyto soumagnei*, one of the rarest Malagasy endemics and one of the most endangered owls of the world, was trapped in the Masoala peninsula, north-east Madagascar. Previously the species was known only from eight museum specimens collected before 1935, a sighting in 1973 and the discovery of a captive individual in 1993 (see *Bird Conservation International* 4: 305–311). The trapped bird, which provided the first record for the species at sea-level, was radio-tagged and released for study. It was observed until December 1995 using radio telemetry to locate it for visual sightings, and appeared to hunt for native insectivores and rodents in open areas subjected to human disturbance. During the day it roosted

in secondary vegetation. Only one type of call was heard: an eerie screech similar to, but more vigorous than, that of Barn Owl *Tyto alba*. In September 1995 the owl was found nesting inside a tree cavity, 2 km from its original roosting area. The two white downy nestlings developed a noticeable facial disc at one month and eventually fledged when they were 10 weeks old, having by this time developed a plumage similar to that of the adults. One young, presumed to be a female, was taken from the nest cavity and fitted with a backpack transmitter. She was observed through March 1996, when she probably dispersed from her natal area, four months after fledging.

Sources: *Ibis* 139, pp 477–481;  
*Ostrich* 68, pp 42–43

## International agreement on sandgrouse conservation

Concern that sandgrouse (Pteroclididae) are being overhunted in parts of their southern African range has led South Africa, Namibia and Botswana to co-operate in drafting an international agreement under the Bonn Convention. The final document will include a sandgrouse conservation plan, species action plans, and details of how the three countries will collaborate in terms of education programmes and research activities. Sandgrouse are sought by both local and overseas hunters, and this is currently a lucrative and expanding industry. The agreement should ensure that sandgrouse are hunted in a sustainable manner. Initially, only the endemic Namaqua Pterocles *namaqua*, Burchell's *P. burchelli* and Double-banded Sandgrouse *P. bicinctus* will be included in the agreement, but the inclusion of other species and the scheme's expansion to other countries will be considered in the future.

Source: *Africa—Birds & Birding* 3(1), p 12

## Albino Karoo Scrub-Robin

In October 1997, an immature albino Karoo Scrub-Robin *Cercotrichas coryphaeus* was captured and photographed at Magersfontein Battlefield Museum, c30 km south of Kimberley, South Africa. The bird had an entirely white plumage, red eyes, a pink bill and pink legs. As a result of relentless mobbing by Little Swifts *Apus affinis* when flying, and by Cape Sparrows *Passer melanurus* and African Masked Weavers *Ploceus velatus* on the ground, the bird was injured on the

head and eventually died. The specimen is currently housed in the McGregor Museum, Kimberley.

Source: Africa—Birds & Birding 3(1), p 7

### Where does the Rockrunner belong?

Writing in a recent issue of *Bull. Brit. Ornithol. Cl.*, Storrs Olson returns to the issue of the taxonomic position of the Rockrunner *Achaetops pycnopygius*. Firstly he traces the species' chequered taxonomic history: it was originally considered congeneric with *Chaetops* (rockjumpers), then a monotypic genus within Timaliidae, and next a monotypic genus of Sylviidae. Subsequently it was deemed congeneric with Grassbird *Sphenoeacus afer*, a superspecies with Moustached Warbler *Melocichla mentalis* and back again to a monotypic genus of Sylviidae.

Olson compares the morphology and osteology of *Sphenoeacus*, *Achaetops* and *Melocichla* and concludes that there are no strong reasons for ignoring the obvious similarities in plumage, skeletons and habits of the rockjumpers (*Chaetops*) and Rockrunner, and that this relationship is probably best observed at the generic level, so that *Achaetops* should in future be regarded as junior synonym of *Chaetops*. He goes on to suggest that *Chaetops* is best placed, once again, in the Timaliidae on the basis of the ambiguity surrounding its familial relationships. Placement within Sylviidae appears ill-advised as *Chaetops* does not appear close, osteologically, to those genera of Sylviidae with which it has been associated and none of the other African members of this large family seem obviously related to it.

Source: *Bull. Brit. Ornithol. Cl.* 118, pp 47–52

### Buller's Albatross: new to Africa

The first African record of Buller's Albatross *Diomedea bulleri*, a New Zealand endemic breeder, occurred on 10 August 1995, when a near-adult was photographed off Cape Peninsula, South Africa. The record has been accepted by the South African Rarities Committee on the basis of its bill structure and colour, and underwing pattern, and is fully described (with two colour photographs of the bird at rest on the sea) in a recent issue of *Limicola*.

Source: *Limicola* 11, pp 306–309

## East Africa

### Arabuko-Sokoke forest reprieved

In late August 1997, Kenya's President Moi overturned proposals by local councillors and MPs to degazette 10% of the Arabuko-Sokoke forest for settlement. Local politicians have agitated for a number of years to have the Kararacha-Mpendakula area of the forest cleared, although the poor soils there would provide little in the way of a livelihood for any settlers. Fortunately, President Moi has sided with local NGOs, including the East Africa Natural History Society, in arguing that the area designated for human settlement, which contains most of the primary *Brachystegia* woodland in the area and is of critical importance for the conservation of Sokoke Pipit *Anthus sokokensis* and Clarke's Weaver *Ploceus golandii*, is too important both ecologically and in ensuring rainfall supplies to be cut. Conservation of the Arabuko-Sokoke forest is currently undertaken by a team from the Forest Department, the Kenya Wildlife Service, the Kenya Forest Research Institute and the National Museums of Kenya, actively supported by BirdLife International through a grant from the European Union.

Source: *World Birdwatch* 19 (4), p 5

### Hinde's Babbler habitat use

Peter Njoroge and his colleagues studied the territoriality and habitat use of Hinde's Babbler *Turdoides hindei* and Northern Pied Babbler *T. hypoleucus* in central Kenya in September 1993–January 1994, with the aim of explaining their different conservation status. The former is a globally endangered species whilst Northern Pied Babbler is an abundant and widespread taxon, which occurs sympatrically throughout the range of the rarer species. The authors found that Hinde's Babbler is inflexible in its habitat choice, being dependent



Northern Pied Babbler *Turdoides hypoleucus*  
by Craig Robson

upon *Lantana* thickets in river valleys or near swamps. Although both species showed similar daily foraging ranges, Hinde's Babbler occupies smaller group territories, which are apparently unrelated to the group's size. *T. hindei* initiates and was victorious in aggressive encounters between the two species over shared feeding areas, but its dependence on *Lantana* thickets makes it highly susceptible to further habitat loss.

Source: *Bird Conservation International* 8, pp 59–65

### Dwarf Raven or Somali Crow?

The taxonomic position of Dwarf Raven *Corvus editbae*, is still a matter of debate. However, recent observations support the view that it is closer to Pied Crow *C. albus* than to Brown-necked Raven *C. ruficollis*, of which it is generally considered a small subspecies. Indeed, hybridization of Dwarf Ravens with Pied Crows seems to be more widespread than was formerly thought, occurring from Nazret in the Rift Valley east of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, south to the Bale Mountains. There are also close similarities in calls and displays of both taxa. This indicates that *C. editbae* is either a subspecies of Pied Crow or a full species, for which the name Somali Crow has been suggested.

Source: Africa—Birds & Birding 3(1), p 13

### Recolonisation of Marianne Island by Seychelles Paradise-Flycatcher after 60 years

A visit to the 95 ha island of Marianne in the Seychelles was made between 6–7 May 1998. The native forest was cleared in the 19th Century to make way for a coconut *Cocos nucifera* plantation, contributing to the extinction of at least five endemic bird species including—since 1936—the Seychelles Paradise-Flycatcher *Terpsiphone corvina*. The rapid ecological assessment showed that a secondary forest of native Takamaka *Calophyllum inophyllum* is regenerating on the steep northern slopes and introduced species—especially Kalis Dipap *Tabebuia pallida*—are dominant on the remainder, and that the old coconut mother trees were dying with little regeneration through the dense understorey. Approximately one fifth of the island was surveyed and three paradise-flycatchers (one male and two females) were found, the first records from Marianne for over 60

years. Further survey work is required to elucidate whether these birds are part of a small population or merely a non-viable overspill from the stronghold on the neighbouring island of La Digue. This population is currently estimated at over 60 pairs and possibly increasing. Paradise-flycatchers were found in small numbers on both Praslin and Félicité in the 1970s.

Baseline surveys are urgently required for both these islands and neighbouring Grand Souer. Seychelles Paradise-Flycatcher is currently listed as critically endangered and establishing a second viable population is an important conservation objective. The Marianne birds might indicate that this task could be easier than had been previously thought, and that woodland regeneration of biologically impoverished coconut plantations could have important conservation benefits.

*Contributed by Stephen Parr,  
BirdLife Seychelles*

### **BirdLife Seychelles**

BirdLife Seychelles was born on 1 January 1998 and takes over the role previously undertaken by BirdLife International in Seychelles as a new country programme office and prospective BirdLife partner. BirdLife International has worked very successfully in Seychelles since 1963, managing Cousin Island since 1968 and has helped rescue Seychelles Brush Warbler *Acrocephalus sechellensis* and Seychelles Magpie-Robin *Copsychus sechellarum* from the brink of extinction. BirdLife Seychelles evolved from two workshops: one at the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (the UK BirdLife International partner) in December 1996 and another in the Seychelles in May 1997. The latter was a large workshop with 25 local participants from government, NGOs and other agencies. All participants, as well as the Seychelles government believed that to optimise its successes in Seychelles, BirdLife International needed to establish a permanent programme office locally. RSPB has funded the establishment of the BirdLife Seychelles office in Victoria and at present there are three core staff: Nirmal Jivan Shah, Country Director; Stephen Parr, Science Coordinator and; Marinette Albest, Programme Assistant. BirdLife Seychelles looks forward to helping to restore islands and threatened endemic birds and to continue to develop Cousin as a successful

ecotourism and education resource whilst maintaining its unspoilt character and natural beauty. BirdLife Seychelles can be contacted at: BirdLife Seychelles, PO Box 1310, Aarti Chambers, Mont Fleuri, Mahe, Seychelles. Tel: +248 225097. Fax: +248 225121. E-mail: [birdlife@seychelles.net](mailto:birdlife@seychelles.net).

*Contributed by BirdLife Seychelles*

### **West Africa**

#### **Migration tracked by satellite: Short-toed Eagle, from France to Niger**

After the successful tracking by satellite telemetry of a rehabilitated immature Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* from France to its wintering grounds in Mali, in 1995 (see *Bull. ABC* 4: 15), the same researchers equipped an adult with a satellite transmitter on its breeding grounds in Charente-Maritime, south-west France, and followed it for 20 days on its 4,685 km migration to its wintering grounds in south-west Niger. The bird took off on 25 September 1996 and arrived on 14 October in its winter quarters, crossing the Strait of Gibraltar on the 3rd. Daily distances covered varied between 17 and 467 km, with a mean of 234 km per day. Near the end of its journey over the Sahara, in northern Mali, the eagle covered the longest daily distances, with 467 and 401 km on 8 and 9 October respectively. The length of the stages was greatly influenced by weather conditions: on sunny days the bird covered 311 km on average, whereas on rainy days this was only 92 km. Speed could be determined on three occasions and was 37, 44 and 51 km/h. The bird left its roost 45 mins to two hours after sunrise and settled between 30 min and two hours before sunset, thus remaining active during up to 10 hrs and 30 mins on days with a length of 11 hrs 45 mins.

*Source: Alauda 66, pp 39-48*

#### **Congo-Brazzaville list update**

A paper documenting 73 recent additions and three deletions from the Congo list, by Robert Dowsett and Françoise Dowsett-Lemaire, has been published in *Malimbus*. The country, from which only 424 species were known at the end of 1988, before the Dowsetts started their fieldwork, already had a total of 569 species some years later (Dowsett 1993), and now has a published list of 639 species (to which at least one was recently added by the same researchers: see Recent

Reports), which is close to the 647 known from nearby Gabon.

*Source: Malimbus 20, pp 15-32*

### **The Democratic Republic of Congo Birding Association**

As of March 1998, the Democratic Republic of Congo (the former Zaïre) has a new media for birders with an interest in the area—The Democratic Republic of Congo Birding Association (DRCBA) through its associated newsletter *Afropavo*, which will appear quarterly.

The organisation's goal is to provide information on the Congolese avifauna. It will also act as a central database for Congolese observations, so all those with unsubmitted observations from the country are urged to send them to the address below. In time, the DRCBA may also take on the responsibility of a formalised Congolese rarity committee.

If you want to know more about DRCBA or want to sign up, please write to: Tommy Pedersen, Nordaassløyfa 21A, N-1251 Oslo, Norway. E-mail: [stingray@online.no](mailto:stingray@online.no). More information can also be obtained from his Congolese web-site at <http://home.sol.no/~stingray/Index.htm>.

*Contributed by Tommy Pedersen*

### **Tree exploitation in Cameroon**

The tree *Prunus africana* is now scarce throughout much of Cameroon (it is critically threatened on Mt. Cameroon) due to unchecked exploitation by the European pharmaceutical company, Plantecam which has been harvesting it since 1972. Regulations formulated to prevent its unsustainable use have been ignored and stricter enforcement of these policies and the direct involvement of local communities, on whose land the tree grows, is clearly required.

*Source: Oryx 32, p 94*

### **North Africa**

#### **First American Swallow-tailed Kite in the Canary Islands**

A recent paper in *Limicola* describes the first record of American Swallow-tailed Kite *Elanoides forficatus* in the Canary Islands, the Western Palearctic and the ABC region, and is illustrated with three colour photographs of the bird, which remained at Cosa Calma, Fuerteventura, between 19-23 March 1993. 📷

*Source: Limicola 12, pp 80-84*

# Requests for Information

## Gambia nightjar coordination project

This project, commenced by Clive Barlow and Gordon Gale and run in conjunction with Research and Development of the Directorate of Parks & Wildlife Management in The Gambia, has the following immediate objectives: i) to create an information database covering all species of nightjar currently known from The Gambia and Senegal, based on photographs, road-kill specimens and sight records, ii) to establish and maintain a photographic library of nightjars in the two countries, and iii) to obtain information from major museums of relevant skins held throughout the world, in order that our knowledge of this group in the two countries can be made as complete as possible. The project coordinators would be extremely grateful for copies of relevant photographs, sight record details, including locality and date, and information on any skins. Full acknowledgement will be made of any assistance in the eventual publication. Contact: The Gambia Nightjar Coordination Project, Hindhead Chase, Crossways Road, Grayshott, Surrey GU26 6HF, England (Tel./Fax: +44 (0)1428 604711).

## Request for slides and photographs

Ed Fletcher, a cultivator of temperate and tropical plants, requires assistance with a private research project into a complete ecological study of the African Baobab tree *Adansonia digitata*. The following species of bird are known to nest in baobabs: Red-billed Buffalo Weaver *Bubalomis niger*, Buffalo Weaver *B. albirostris*, Red-headed Weaver *Anaplectes rubiceps*, Red-and-yellow Barbet *Trachyphonus erythrocephalus*, Red-fronted Barbet *Tricholaema diademata*, Red-fronted Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus pusillus*, Black-collared Barbet *Lybius torquatus*, Wahlberg's Eagle *Aquila wahlbergi*, Fork-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis*, Black-throated Honeyguide *Indicator indicator* hosts, Whyte's Barbet *Stactolaema whytii*, Grey-headed Kingfisher *Halcyon leucocephala* and

Striped Kingfisher *H. chelicuti*.

Photographs of any these species would be most welcome (all material will be returned) and should be sent to: Ed Fletcher, 17 Winton Road, Hatherley, Cheltenham, Glos GL51 5AX, England.

## Morocco bird report

*Porphyrio* is a relatively new publication produced by Group d'Ornithologie du Maroc Central (GOMC) and edited by Professor J. Franchimont, Faculté de Sciences, Meknes, Morocco, and includes an annual report on Moroccan birds. The latest volume (8) was published in 1997 and includes the report for 1995. These reports rely to a significant extent on information supplied by visiting birdwatchers. Although many have submitted reports, it is thought that many others remain uncollected and thus all birders visiting Morocco are urged to submit their observations. Selected records, of more unusual or rare species, can also be sent to Dr M. Thévenot, Université Montpellier, France for inclusion in the European news section published bi-annually in *British Birds*. Anyone interested in purchasing *Porphyrio* is invited to become an associate member of GMOC (annual subscription £14) by writing to GMOC, Faculté de Sciences de Meknes, BP 4010-Beni M'hamed, 50003 Meknes, Morocco.

## Queen Elizabeth National Park Bird Observatory (QENPBO), Uganda

In 1996, a feasibility study was undertaken in the Queen Elizabeth National Park, Uganda, to assess whether a Bird Observatory and ringing station could be established there. The two week study was a success, and following on from this Malcolm Wilson, the project leader, has been ringing and bird recording in the park since February 1997. Attempts to acquire funding for the project have thus far proved difficult, but recent developments within Uganda appear favourable and the establishment of a centre may not be too far away. Contacts and the situation in the park have developed well and Malcolm would welcome assistance from ringers or birdwatchers who are

interested in mist-netting or general census work. Low cost or free accommodation can be arranged (depending on the number of people present) and flights to Kampala from Britain range from £450 to £750. It may be possible to arrange transportation from Kampala to the park. Anyone interested in assisting the project between early March and late April, and late September and late January should contact Paul Roper, 1 Dewhurst Old School, 94 Churchgate, Cheshunt, Herts EN8 9WB. Tel: + 44 (0) 1992 640388.

## Important Bird Areas in The Gambia

The Important Bird Area (IBA) project for Africa, coordinated by BirdLife International, is running in The Gambia during 1997-1998. Its purpose is to select sites of international importance for bird conservation. Various criteria have been developed by BirdLife for selecting sites. For example, the Tanji Bird Reserve and Bijol Islands are candidate IBAs as the number of roosting Caspian *Sterna caspia* and Royal Terns *S. maxima* far exceed the threshold of 1% of the African population of these species (a site qualification). The Gambian IBA project is currently gathering data to select sites before a programme of surveys is undertaken.

All unpublished data which could help the project is needed. In particular, counts of >100 waterbirds, especially in non-coastal areas, are especially valuable as are all records of Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii*, Lesser Flamingo *Phoenicopterus minor*, Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* and Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*. All assistance will be acknowledged in the report, and details of IBA criteria can be obtained from the address below. If you think you may be able to help please contact: Paul Robinson, Department of Parks and Wildlife Management, Abuko Nature Reserve, PO Box 2164, Serekunda, The Gambia. Fax: 220 495546. ☎

# Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Guides Association (ASFGA)

*David Ngala, of the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Guides Association, reports on the activities of this relatively new organisation which is a recent beneficiary of the ABC's Affiliated Memberships scheme (for details of this project contact the Club Secretary via the Club address).*

Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Reserve is a lowland tropical forest on the East African coast. It was gazetted in 1937, but only became well-known in 1983 following an expedition to study its rare birds. Four different vegetation types are found on three distinctive soils in the reserve. The forest is surrounded by villages in eight areas and in two districts. These adjacent communities benefit economically from the forest through butterfly farming and plans to keep bees are underway. The Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Management Team is composed of individuals from four government institutions and is responsible for the integrated management of the forest.

The Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Guides Association (ASFGA) was formed two years ago to support the conservation and sustainable use of Arabuko-Sokoke forest. It has 15 active members the majority of whom are keen birders, although there are also those with specialist knowledge of plants, traditional medicine, butterflies and animals. Part of the Guides' activities are monthly bird walks in the forest for the public, which raises

income for the Association. The Guides also take individual visitors and groups for bird and nature walks and lead tours for hotel clients. The Association educates local youth on sustainable use of the forest and collects natural history observations made in the forest.


Being part of the ABC will help broaden ASFGA members' views and knowledge of developments elsewhere in Africa, enabling us to learn of potentially useful methods of managing the Arabuko-Sokoke reserve. We hope that the forest will benefit from greater publicity and attract more visitors coming to see the rare birds.

. . . . .  
*David Ngala, de l'Association des Guides de la Forêt d'Arabuko-Sokoke (ASFGA), rend compte des activités de cette association, constituée il y a deux ans et récemment acceptée comme Membre Affilié du ABC (pour les détails de cette formule: voir 'Club News').*

La Réserve forestière d'Arabuko-Sokoke consiste en une forêt tropicale de basse altitude située sur la côte est africaine. Bien qu'officiellement délimitée en 1937, sa renommée ornithologique ne date que de 1983, suite à une expédition consacrée à l'étude de ses oiseaux rares. La forêt est entourée de communautés villageoises, qui bénéficient économiquement de celle-ci par, entre autres, l'élevage de papillons; des projets

d'apiculture vont également démarrer. Une équipe de gestion, composée de représentants de quatre institutions gouvernementales, est chargée de la gestion intégrée de la forêt.

L'ASFGA a été créée afin d'améliorer la conservation et l'utilisation durable de la forêt d'Arabuko-Sokoke. Elle compte 15 membres actifs, en majorité très compétents sur le plan ornithologique; plusieurs d'entre eux ont également des connaissances spécialisées des plantes, de la médecine traditionnelle, des papillons et des mammifères. Une fois par mois, les guides organisent des excursions ornithologiques ouvertes au public, qui constituent une source de revenus pour l'Association. Par ailleurs, ils organisent des excursions pour observer les oiseaux ou la nature pour des visiteurs individuels ou des groupes. L'Association forme la jeunesse locale à l'utilisation durable de la forêt et rassemble les observations faites sur le terrain concernant l'histoire naturelle d'Arabuko-Sokoke.

Par son adhésion au ABC, l'Association compte s'informer des développements sur le plan ornithologique en Afrique, ainsi que des méthodes qui pourraient être utiles pour la gestion de la Réserve. Elle espère également que la forêt bénéficiera de la publicité accrue et attirera davantage de visiteurs désirant observer ses oiseaux rares. 

# Obituary:

## John George Williams

### 4 April 1913–28 December 1997

Welsh, short, ebullient, irreverent and enthusiastic, John Williams died in late December 1997. The last in a long line of Africa's great collector-ornithologists that started in the 18th century. Like so many before him, he started as an amateur without academic qualifications in zoology. John Williams went to Africa as a young man in the RAF's medical arm during the Second World War. He fell in love with the land and when an opportunity to join the staff of the Coryndon Memorial Museum's (now Kenya's National Museum) arose after the war, his already profound general knowledge of natural history secured him the post.

Without question he was the right man in the right place at the right time. His predecessor had departed in a cloud of controversy, taking with him most of the museum's bird collection. This deprived the institute (perhaps *the* most important natural history museum in the tropics) of one of its most important assets. John Williams was an enthusiastic collector and immediately set about rebuilding the collection. In due course it was to become far more comprehensive than it had originally been and a particularly important reference base in African ornithology.

Williams was a broad-based naturalist and could have secured employment with the museum as a mammologist or entomologist. His knowledge of Africa's butterflies and moths was of the highest order and he was a true expert on the continent's bats. In both fields, he made new discoveries and contributed profoundly to our present knowledge.

It was John Williams' fate that his tenure as ornithologist coincided with the rise of African nationalism and the era of independence. Much as he loved the land of his adoption, he was one of those who was pessimistic about governance by untried Africans. In particular, he feared that natural sciences—such as ornithology—would not rank highly in the new order of priorities and that the collections so painstakingly built up would not subsequently be properly cared for. Ahead of his time, John was aware of just how fast habitats were changing and realised that many of the

specimens he had obtained could never be replaced as the species in question no longer existed where he had obtained them. Against considerable criticism, he deliberately shipped off some of the museum's more valuable skins to institutions that he felt had a more secure political future. While his decisions may still be questioned ethically, subsequent events have proved that his prediction of improper care was not entirely misplaced. Conservation and the welfare of natural history collections have not ranked highly in the face of Africa's huge economic woes.

John also correctly predicted that the 'job security' of expatriates such as himself could not be counted on and that if he was to remain economically buoyant he would have to fend for himself. In the mid-1960s he left the museum and established an advisory service for the wildlife-based East African tourist industry. *Inter alia* this soon illustrated both sound business acumen and his very broad general knowledge of East African natural history. Nowhere was this better reflected than in the Collins Field Guides to East African birds, butterflies and national parks which he authored.

Although Williams did not publish as widely in the scientific literature as he might have done, he nonetheless contributed more than any other individual in the past 50 years to the public's knowledge of East African birds. His greatest gift was in imparting enthusiasm—particularly to the young. He treated any specimen brought to the museum for identification or in donation as exceptionally valuable, making young donors feel that they were advancing science significantly. In contradiction of modern conservationism, he actively encouraged a 'hands on' approach to natural history. He avoided admonition not to touch or disturb, but in complete sympathy with youth's drive to be directly involved, he gently directed interests into responsible channels. In no time after taking up his position at the museum, he had a corps of youthful observers spread across the land. Like some Pied Piper and in a quite extraordinary way, John George—as many knew

*Obituary: John George Williams (continued)*

him—entrenched a lifelong interest in natural history to a whole generation. In turn this has had a profound influence upon the region's conservation.

One did not have to collect to benefit from JGW's (another nickname) interest or help, but if one did he imparted his own very high standards of specimen preparation. The lilt of his Welsh voice saying "sleep my pretty one; sleep!" as he laid a perfectly prepared specimen to rest in a drawer, or the naughty twinkle when referring to his august superior—Dr Louis B. Leakey—as our father which ought to be in Heaven, have stayed in many memories down the years. His irreverence was without malice and was part of the man's charm. Only one person could call him to order—

his deeply loved wife Philipa. Nothing brought John George closer to panic than the threat of reporting some 'less repeatable' quote to her. Ornithology has lost an important contributor, but few in the world of birds so genuinely warranted the sobriquet of irrepressible character.

John married Doctor Philipa Gaffikin in Cairo during the War. Philipa predeceased him and they are survived by one son and three daughters. John George Williams had a rich life well lived of which his descendants can be proud. To those of us brought up under his influence, he was truly one of the major landmarks in our lives. ☾

*Ian Parker, January 1998.*



*Marsh Wren*  
by Terry O'Neale

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# ABC/NHBS Book Awards



The ABC is delighted to announce the launch of the ABC/NHBS Book awards, a new collaboration between the ABC and the Natural History Book Service. Five book vouchers of £100 (\$150) each will be awarded to successful applicants. These vouchers can be redeemed against books sold by NHBS and will be posted to the recipients free of charge.

The priority of these awards is to promote the awareness of birds and their conservation in Africa and therefore priority will be given to those applicants who can demonstrate that the material will be available for a wide range of people to consult. However we do not want individuals to feel discouraged from applying and will consider requests from outstanding individual applicants. Applications can be made, in English or French, to the Club's address following the guidelines below. The deadline for applications is 31 January 1999 and successful applicants will be notified within 12 weeks of the deadline.

## **How to apply**

The award scheme has been set up to provide bird books and books about the African environment to institutions and individuals. These could either be for a specific piece of work, capacity building in an institution or public awareness.

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- the work for which the books will be used and why they are needed
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- what will happen to the books after the project is finished

## **Applications can be sent:**

by post to: African Bird Club, c/o BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton, Cambridge CB3 0PA, UK. Fax ++ - 44 - 1223 - 277200, or by email to: Rob.Lucking@rspb.org.uk

## **Book Information**

If you need more information on available titles, NHBS produces a range of catalogues, which are free on request from: NATURAL HISTORY BOOK SERVICE LTD, 2-3 Wills Road, Totnes, Devon TQ9 5XN, U.K.

# Summary of a study by Hungarian ornithologists on Mount Cameroon

Ákos Hivekovics and Péter Palatitz

As Hungary does not have any diplomatic or trading relations with Cameroon, it caused quite a stir that three ornithologists from the Hungarian Action Team for the Conservation of Nature (TACS) visited the country in autumn 1996. The TACS foundation is involved (amongst other projects) in organising and assisting important international ornithological surveys, and thus offered help to the Mt. Cameroon Project, which was accepted.

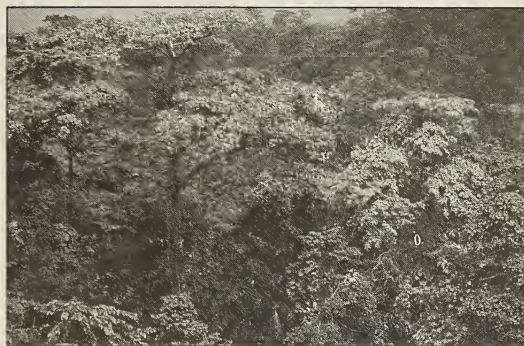
We reached Cameroon following a delayed journey via Nigeria but then, in Limbe, we were given a warm welcome and met O'Kah, the project's zoologist and ABC's representative in Cameroon.

## Our work

Fieldwork was conducted by three Hungarians and O'Kah, who were accompanied by a cook, two guides and one lepidopterist. Our work was to collect comprehensive data in five different sample areas on the volcano where no previous ornithological studies had been made, or additional work was required. As Mt. Cameroon is ranked among the 25 most important forested areas for birds in Africa<sup>2</sup> and lies within two Endemic Bird Areas (EBAs)<sup>3</sup>, it is important to collect as much data as possible on the area's fauna.



Primary rainforest around Debundsha Lake (Ákos Hivekovics)

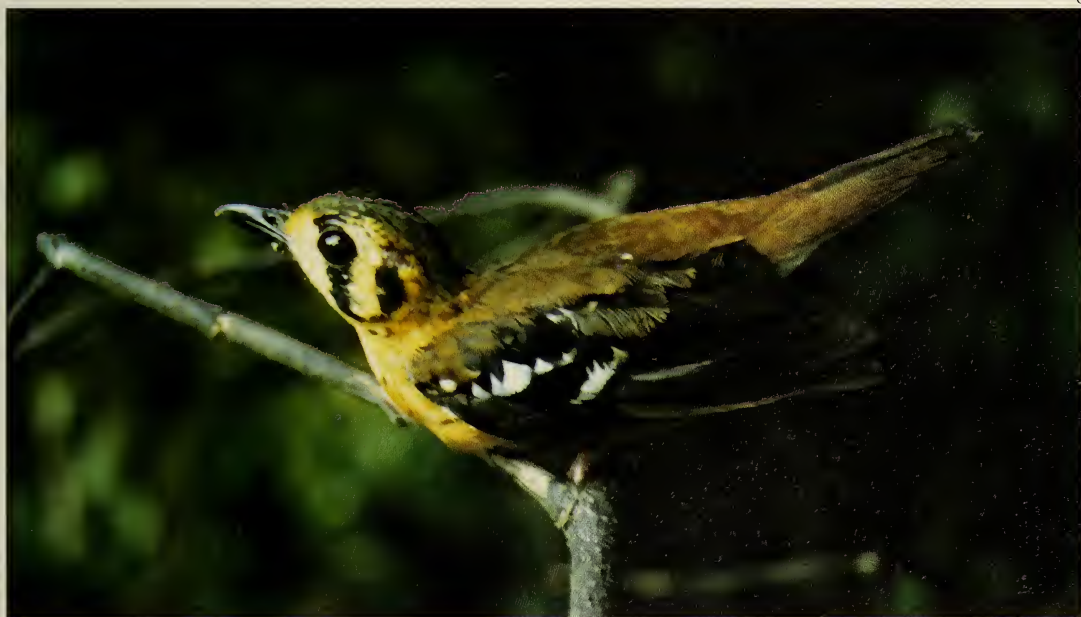


Lowland primary rainforest around Debundsha Lake (Ákos Hivekovics)

Our first sample area was N'jonji Lake at c350 m, which lies deep in undisturbed lowland forest. Three different survey methods were used in each area: mist-netting (with ringing), canopy-netting and daily line-transects. At N'jonji Lake, 83 birds of 29 species were ringed during the six-day ringing period, and line-transects produced a further 33 species. The five most common species were: **Olive Sunbird** *Nectarinia olivacea*, **Yellow-whiskered Greenbul** *Andropadus latirostris*, **Rufous-vented Paradise-Flycatcher** *Tersiphone rufocinerea*, **Brown-chested Alethe** *Alethe poliocephala* and **Grey Malimbe** *Malimbus nitens*. These five represented 61.6% of the total number of birds caught. Rarer and interesting species recorded were: **African Piculet** *Sasia africana*, **White-spotted Flufftail** *Sarothrura pulchra* and **Cameroon Olive Greenbul** *Phyllastrephus poensis*.

The second study area—Lava-flow—takes its name from an eruption in 1922 which created a huge lava-flow down to sea-level. It destroyed all the vegetation in its wake—which has since regrown—but local people currently use the area for farming. Our camp was established near an uninhabited banana plantation. Here, we caught 196 birds of 46 species (not including re-traps), whilst line-transects produced an additional 17 species. The five most common species were **Yellow-whiskered Greenbul**, **Little Greenbul** *Andropadus virens*, **Bluebill** *Spermophaga baematina*, **Olive Sunbird** and **Black-headed Weaver** *Ploceus melanocephalus*. These represented 43.7% of the total number of birds caught in this





- 1 West African Goshawk *Accipiter(tachiro) toussenelli* (Ákos Hivekovics)
- 2 Blue-shouldered Robin-Chat *Cossypha cyanocampter* (Ákos Hivekovics)
- 3 Simple Greenbul *Chlorocichla simplex* (Ákos Hivekovics)
- 4 African Piculet *Sasia africana* (Ákos Hivekovics)
- 5 Cameroon Blue-headed Sunbird *Nectarinia oritis* (Ákos Hivekovics)
- 6 Black-eared Ground-Thrush *Zoothera camaronensis* (Ákos Hivekovics)

area. Most interesting were records of **Black-eared Ground-Thrush** *Zoothera camaronensis* and **Blue-shouldered Robin-chat** *Cossypha cyanocampter*.

Debundsha Lake—our next study site—which has the third highest annual rainfall of any place in the world (9,000–10,000 mm pa), is situated in a symmetrical secondary crater near the sea. The approach is difficult and consequently the area is largely undisturbed. Because of the near-perma-

nent rain, we only caught 44 birds of 14 species, whilst line-transects provided an additional 21 species. The most common were: **Little Grey Greenbul** *Andropadus gracilis*, **Olive Sunbird**, **Yellow whiskered Greenbul**, **Bluebill** and **Pygmy Kingfisher** *Ceyx picta*. These five species comprised 76.1 % of the total number of birds caught. More interesting species recorded were **Green-tailed Bristlebill** *Bleda eximia*, **White-browed Forest-flycatcher** *Fraseria cinerascens* and an **African Grey Parrot** *Psittacus erythacus*, which is available for sale everywhere in Limbe, despite its CITES II status.

The fourth sample area—at the border of the cloud-forest and the savannah region—is known as Man's Spring and lies at c3,400 m. Canopy-netting has never been performed there. Annual rainfall is comparatively low, only 2,000–3,000 mm, while the relative humidity is always c95%. The region's diversity is lower than in lowland rainforest, with only 12–14 plant species per 0.5 ha. The dominant tree species in this cloud-forest (*Pittosporum* spp., *Ilex mitis* etc.) are not more than 20–25 m tall. Despite the relatively depauperate vegetation, the number of bird species recorded was significantly higher than at other study sites: we ringed 166 birds of 21 species of which the most common were **Yellow Bishop** *Euplectes capensis*, **Black-crowned Waxbill** *Estrilda nonnula*, **Oriole Finch** *Linurgus olivaceus*, **Northern Double-collared Sunbird** *Nectarinia preussi* and **Black-capped Speirops** *Speirops lugubris*. These species accounted for 67% of the total number of birds caught. Two endemics were recorded: **Cameroon Blue-headed Sunbird** *Nectarinia oritis* and **Mountain Saw-wing** *Psalidoprocne fuliginosa*. Because of the permanent cloud and rain, line-transects were abandoned as we only observed one species that was not trapped—a dark-phase **Eleonora's Falcon** *Falco eleonora*, which made a brief appearance. There is just one previous record in West Africa, from Mali (D Ristow pers. comm.), and future observers should be aware of the possibility of its occurrence.

Our final study area was in Bakingili Forest, a secondary forest at c400 m. Here we caught 54 birds of 13 species, and line-transects produced 36 more. Only one species not previously trapped was caught: a **West African Goshawk** *Accipiter (tachiro) toussenellii*. The five most common species were **Yellow-whiskered Greenbul**, **Little Grey Greenbul**, **Olive Sunbird**, **Forest Robin** *Stiphrornis erythrothorax* and **Brown Illadopsis** *Illadopsis fulvescens* which accounted for 79.9% of the total number of birds caught.

## Conclusions

The primary aim of our work in the Mt. Cameroon region was to collect data to reinforce the volcano's



Savannah on Mt. Cameroon, with Petit Mt. Cameroon (2,700 m) in the background (Ákos Hivekovics)

conservation importance. In this respect we caught six species endemic to south-west Cameroon and nearby offshore islands, and recorded a total of 116 species during the survey. Seven of these are considered threatened by BirdLife International<sup>1</sup>. Most of these occur in undisturbed forest. In addition, four species of migrant from Europe (**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos*, **Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus*, **Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica* and **Great Reed-Warbler** *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*) were trapped during our stay on the mountain. The principal human influences on the area are hunting and agriculture. Tree-felling is not such a serious problem as valuable hardwood trees were cut by German colonists between 1890–1918, and the replacement growth is not yet ready to be felled. The most significant problem is that villagers practise shifting cultivation and thus it is important to acquaint them with agricultural strategies which respect environmental considerations as well as socio-economic interests.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the other members of the Mt. Cameroon project for their hospitality and the opportunity to work with them in the field. ☺

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*Hungarian Action Team for the Conservation of Nature, H-1125 Budapest, Csengery utca 11.11./201, Hungary.*

# Green-breasted Bush-shrike

## *Malaconotus gladiator* and its relationship with Monteiro's Bush-shrike *M. monteiri*

Eddie Williams

Le Gladiateur à poitrine verte *Malaconotus gladiator* et le Gladiateur de Monteiro *M. monteiri* sont deux espèces en danger et difficiles à observer, connues de quelques forêts ouest africaines seulement. Les observations récentes de l'auteur au sud-ouest du Cameroun laissent supposer que le répertoire vocal de *M. gladiator* est plus varié qu'indiqué dans la littérature, ce qui pourrait amener l'observateur à confondre cette espèce avec *M. monteiri*. Tenter de distinguer les deux espèces uniquement sur la base des vocalisations semble être hasardeux et il est possible qu'elles ne représentent que deux formes d'une même espèce. Tandis que la position systématique des deux taxons vis-à-vis d'autres gladiateurs, en particulier le Gladiateur ensanglanté *M. cruentus*, a déjà fait l'objet de recherches dans le passé, la possibilité qu'il s'agisse d'une seule espèce ne semble pas encore avoir été envisagée. Il semble que les deux taxons aient connu une évolution parallèle et en isolement géographique et écologique par rapport au Gladiateur de Blanchot *M. blanchoti*. Des recherches supplémentaires sont souhaitables, étant donné la rareté de ces deux gladiateurs.

### Introduction

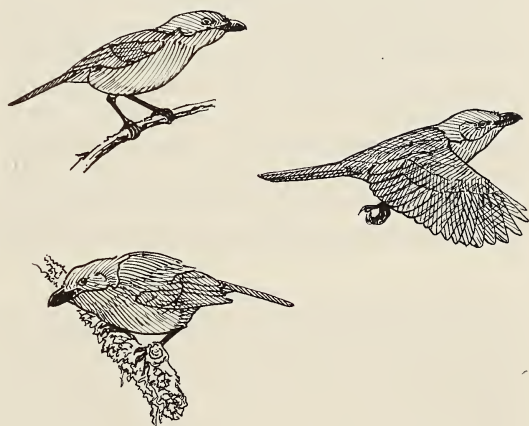
**G**reen-breasted Bush-shrike is an elusive, canopy-dwelling species which occurs at very low density in montane forest in western Cameroon and eastern Nigeria. It is currently considered 'Vulnerable' by Birdlife International<sup>3</sup> and consequently figures high on the menu of the increasing number of birders now visiting western Cameroon in search of the region's many endemics.

Monteiro's Bush-Shrike is an even more elusive species, with only a handful of records from montane forest in Angola and western Cameroon, and is currently classed as 'Endangered'<sup>3</sup>. Although considered by some authorities to be a race of Grey-headed Bush-shrike *M. blanchoti*<sup>6</sup>, the rationale for this treatment appears tenuous. The latter is primarily a lowland bush and woodland inhabitant with no zones of intergradation with *monteiri*. There are, however, similarities in the plumage and vocalisations of the two taxa.

### Vocalisations

Both Green-breasted and Monteiro's Bush-shrikes are best located by call. That of the former is described as a series of three mournful whistles each with an upward-terminating inflection<sup>1</sup>. While this appears to be the most frequent call, it has also been described as making a series of up to six mournful whistles, some lacking the upward-terminating inflection<sup>5</sup>.

The call of Monteiro's Bush-shrike is described as similar to, but distinct from, that of Green-breasted,



Green-breasted Bush-shrike *Malaconotus gladiator*  
by Mark Andrews

namely a series of five whistles, each shorter than those of the latter species, and lacking the upward-terminating inflection<sup>1</sup>. The calls are described as being identical to those of Grey-headed Bush-shrike<sup>5</sup>.

However, recent observations I have made of Green-breasted Bush-shrike in south-west Cameroon suggest that its repertoire is more varied and may be confusable with the calls of Monteiro's.

### Recent observations

On 20 June 1997 at Lake Edib, in the Bakossi mountains, I heard a calling *Malaconotus* sp. at 1,250 m in montane forest. The bird was using a long series of

whistles each without any upward-terminating inflection. I whistled back, causing it to draw nearer where it remained in the canopy above me, calling persistently. When it eventually came into view, it proved not to be the expected Monteiro's but a Green-breasted Bush-shrike. The calls consisted of a series of 5–10 whistles, each slightly shorter than the bird's 'usual' calls and without any upward inflection at their end. I made tape-recordings of this bird and was able to clearly observe it calling, eliminating the possibility of there being two birds present. The calls sounded similar to some sequences given by Grey-headed Bush-Shrike and tape comparisons bear this out.

The following day I encountered what may have been the same calling bird in the same area, which I again 'whistled in'. The calls were identical to those of the previous day with the exception of two series of four whistles in which the two end notes in each series undulated up-and-down.

In addition, F Dowsett-Lemaire (FDL) reports (pers. comm. to G Kirwan 1998) that, of six different *M. gladiator* heard in the Kodmin area and several around Edib (both localities in the Bakossi mountains) in April 1998 none exhibited any upward-terminating inflection in their whistles. Two of these birds were observed. The same also holds true for two *M. gladiator* watched singing on Mt. Kupe, Cameroon in 1997 by the same observer. FDL has noticed two other call types in the repertoire of *M. gladiator* (which are shared by Grey-headed Bush-shrike), both of which

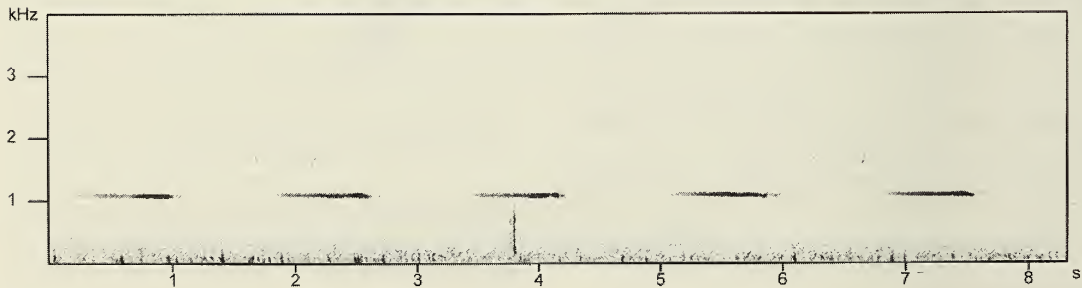
she has heard frequently. "Tearing" calls are given in series' of up to five; "broken whistles" exhibit a distinct break in the middle of the 'song' with the second part being higher-pitched, and are interspersed with monotonous whistles. This call-type may correspond to those I heard on 21 June 1997, in which the song appeared to undulate. One bird observed by FDL at 1,200 m near Lake Edib in April 1998 gave all three call types.

### Discussion

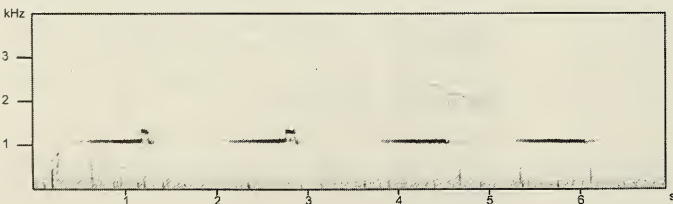
In view of these observations, I believe it is unsafe to distinguish between Green-breasted and Monteiro's Bush-shrikes on the basis of call alone. Furthermore, I believe it is consequently worth considering that they might be colour morphs of the same species, with Monteiro's possibly replacing Green-breasted further south in Angola, where the latter remains unknown. Further evidence to support this possibility is provided by Andrews<sup>1</sup>, who observed Monteiro's responding to imitations of Green-breasted and consequently interacting with one by a duet.

Also relevant is the fact that both Monteiro's and Green-breasted appear to be the only two species of larger *Malaconotus* which are sympatric at the same altitude and in the same habitat. All other large *Malaconotus* usually appear to be mutually exclusive. For example, on Mt. Kupe (Cameroon), Fiery-breasted Bush-shrike *M. cruentus* occurs in lower altitude farmbrush and secondary growth (pers. obs.), Mount

*Malaconotus gladiator* 20/06/97 Bakossi Mtns, Cameroon (E Williams)



*Malaconotus gladiator* 21/06/97 Bakossi Mtns, Cameroon (E Williams)



Kupe Bush-shrike *M. kupeensis* is in primary forest from 950–1,450 m, with Green-breasted and apparently Monteiro's Bush-shrikes occurring above 1,400 m<sup>2</sup>. (The 50 m range of apparent overlap is probably due to variability in altitudinal calculations by observers.) While individuals do wander between altitudes, the vast majority of records conform to this rule. However, in the Bakossi mountains *M. kupeensis* has been recorded twice in the Edib area (by I Faucher; FDL and R J Dowsett) at 1,150 m and 1,150–1,200 m, and thus overlapping with *gladiator*. Indeed one bird was observed within 500 m of a Green-breasted Bush-shrike, although the two species occupy different niches, with *kupeensis* favouring the middle strata and *gladiator* the canopy (FDL pers. comm. to G Kirwan 1998). On mountains where Mount Kupe Bush-shrike is absent, it is noticeable that Green-breasted Bush-shrike occurs regularly at much lower altitudes, down to 950 m on Mt. Cameroon for instance; although, at this locality montane species typically occur at lower altitudes due to the very high rainfall and lower temperatures experienced there<sup>9</sup>.

There remains an anomaly regarding the size of Monteiro's Bush-shrike. In the field it is described as appearing larger than Green-breasted and heavier looking than Grey-headed Bush-shrike. Conversely an examination of skins revealed that Monteiro's appeared smaller than Green-breasted<sup>1</sup>. *Malaconotus* species, however, are known to be variable in size within species<sup>4</sup>, although there is room for further study of this issue.

The taxonomic position of Monteiro's Bush-shrike is addressed at length by Hall *et al*<sup>1</sup>. These authors provide a convincing argument for the separation of Monteiro's from Grey-headed which I believe also has a bearing on its relationship with Green-breasted. They maintain that it is highly unlikely that the Monteiro's Bush-shrike collected on Mt. Cameroon in 1894<sup>7</sup> could be independently derived from Grey-headed Bush-shrike, in forest habitat 300 km from the nearest savannah-dwelling population of the latter, by changes in facial and iris coloration exactly paralleling those in the Angolan population. The recent discovery of the Mt. Kupe population—also isolated from any population of Grey-headed Bush-shrike—reinforces this argument. Green-breasted Bush-shrike appears to have evolved in a similar manner to Monteiro's, in geographically and ecologically isolated areas from those of Grey-headed.

Although Hall *et al*<sup>1</sup> considered Green-breasted Bush-shrike a monomorphic species they do mention its grey iris, identical in colour to that of Monteiro's, another relevant factor when considering its relation-

ship. Grey-headed Bush-shrike has a yellow iris. Hall *et al*<sup>1</sup> also considered that Monteiro's could be a colour morph or race of Fiery-breasted Bush-shrike on account of its identical iris colour and similar facial pattern. They do not consider, however, differences in habitat (discussed above) and vocal differences: the most regular calls of Fiery-breasted being a series of 5–6 short barbet-like hoots (pers. obs.), totally unlike the long mournful whistles of Monteiro's and Green-breasted.

The differences between the plumages of Green-breasted and Monteiro's Bush-shrikes are less relevant than they would otherwise seem when we consider the fact that the African bush-shrikes taken as a whole contain some of the most extreme and varied examples of polymorphism known among birds. Intra-genus polymorphism is also discussed in detail by Hall *et al*<sup>1</sup> and is, in any case, beyond the scope of this article. One example worthy of mention, however, is the occurrence in south-west Cameroon of a yellow-breasted variant of Fiery-breasted Bush-shrike. Individuals have been collected at Kumba<sup>8</sup> and I observed one on Mt. Kupe in June 1997. Given a good view, it can be separated from Monteiro's by the lack of yellow crescent-shaped tips to the wing-coverts and smaller yellow tips to the tertials. The existence of these individuals should be borne in mind by observers presented with a possible Monteiro's, especially one seen only from below (a highly probable scenario), in which case habitat and calls would be the only clues to the birds identity.

To summarise, I believe there is some evidence to suggest that Green-breasted and Monteiro's Bush-shrikes are conspecific. Further study, including that based upon DNA testing, is clearly required, although this will be no easy task given the rarity of the subjects and their elusive habits. Perhaps the greatest problem facing future researchers is the continuing depletion of montane forest in the region, and that these enigmatic birds will consequently disappear before these issues can be resolved.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Richard Ranft, of the National Sound Archive, for producing the sonograms using Avisoft-Sonograph Pro, Guy Kirwan for reading an early draft of this article and providing information used to improve it, and Françoise Dowsett-Lemaire for her extensive comments on the manuscript and allowing me to include her unpublished data. I would also like to thank Mark Andrews for listening to the tape-recordings and providing useful comments. ☺

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# The African pipit enigma

Richard Liversidge

L'identification des grands pipits à dos uni est notoirement difficile. L'auteur estime que les méthodes d'identification actuelles sont inadéquates et que, plutôt qu'aux détails de leur plumage, plus d'attention devrait probablement être apportée au comportement, à la structure et aux mouvements de ces oiseaux. Maintes observations sont incertaines. L'auteur décrit son expérience concernant la description d'au moins une nouvelle espèce de pipit en Afrique du Sud, et donne des conseils aux observateurs désirant perfectionner leurs capacités d'identification de ce groupe d'oiseaux, particulièrement dans la partie sud du continent.

There are a few 'golden oldies' such as myself that were acquainted with ornithologists that knew Africa before 1930: the year of Rear-Admiral Lynes' great monograph *Review of the Genus Cisticola*<sup>1</sup>. Prior to 1930, according to James Chapin (pers. comm.), the understanding of *Cisticola* in Africa was utterly confused. Now at the end of the 20th century, the status of pipits in Africa (and perhaps elsewhere) generates total confusion and nobody understands what is going on! Some species of pipit are easily distinguished but there is a group of larger brown birds that most people guess at.

Evidence for this confusion comes from *The Birds of Africa* Vol 4<sup>2</sup> where the authors recognise two plain-backed species of pipits in southern Africa—Plain-backed Pipit *A. leucophrys* and Buffy Pipit *A. vaalensis*—but only *A. leucophrys* in East Africa. Yet Zimmerman *et al*<sup>3</sup> and van Perlo<sup>4</sup> state that both these species occur in East Africa and both sources differ from each other.

What we need is a major work on pipits covering the whole of Africa and following the example set by Admiral Lynes. There has been a good start by Gary Voelker who is currently completing his thesis with work on DNA analysis of pipits. But we also need fieldwork by people able to see, interpret and distinguish such difficult birds in the field; also to record and produce sonograms of their different flight calls with absolute certainty as to the birds' identification. I say this with caution because there is a sonogram in the *Birds of the Western Palearctic*<sup>2</sup> of a pipit's flight call which I believe may have been incorrectly identified.

It was a challenge that started me off looking at pipits—I was candidly accused of not looking at pipits properly. I accepted this statement because I had seen a flock of 40 pipits that I had not been able to identify. This led—after five years—to finding and describing a new species of pipit in southern Africa<sup>3</sup>, the Long-tailed Pipit *Anthus longicaudatus*.

It was an interesting experience first to identify the bird with confidence and then to convince myself



Large Pipit *Anthus* sp.  
by Craig Robson

that it was indeed a new species. Complicated by the fact that it was an austral winter visitor to my home patch, I had to wait for months to pass before taking the next step in the process of identification. I was helped by Gary Voelker who encouraged me from his own unpublished work. However, it also added fuel to the fire of confusion on the identification of pipits, because Gary Voelker told me that DNA from a bird which I had identified as Long-billed Pipit *A. similis* was not the same as his Long-billed Pipits.

To add to the confusion, Ian Sinclair *et al*<sup>6</sup> had identified a pipit from the Transkei coast that he called a Buffy Pipit but which I found in the field to be similar to my 'new' Long-billed Pipit. I am convinced that it is not Buffy Pipit, and although we have not yet obtained a specimen, I believe that it may also be a new species!

So, we have confusion in our pipits and almost certainly nobody in southern Africa is looking at pipits 'properly'.

In the wake of these experiences, I have come to the conclusion that we are not looking at the right

characters to identify pipits. Clearly it is not sufficient to examine plumage detail in the way we have been. The proof is that, in looking at pipits in this manner we have not recognised the new species. Part of the problem stems from field guides which as their name implies are only field guides. For birds with distinct plumage characteristics such guides help, but for the difficult groups they are near-hopeless. It has been my good fortune to see and hear birds as individuals which, like the human species, show enormous intraspecific variation. Strangely most birders do not realise there is such variation within species. So each pipit species has several plumages and between species there appears to be considerable overlap. This is apart from geographical differences of size and coloration which confuse the issues still further, as pipits are known to wander widely.

My own experience and fresh approach came from an accident of poor sight. I had five eye operations during the time I was trying to identify the new species. This meant that I was unable to identify pipits using conventional plumage-detail differences. Instead, I was forced to look at body posture and movements, feeding and general behaviour. Also, despite my age—71—my hearing is unusually good and I was able to distinguish some calls either by virtue of their notes or loudness.

Each species of pipit walks in a different manner and has a different foraging style. Each has a different way of pecking its food resource. Some lift their heads between pecks, the Buffy Pipit for example is like a jack-in-the-box. After each peck, its head comes right up and it sticks its chest out. This can be seen and positively identified at 30 m with poor eyes! Indeed it was my familiarity with Buffy Pipit that enabled me to separate Long-tailed Pipit from it. Long-tailed Pipit, in contrast, walks horizontally like a wagtail and wags not only its tail but its whole body up-and-down. This movement is mentioned by Benson *et al*<sup>1</sup> as 'pumping'. No other book seems to mention such behaviour, although it occurs in several pipit species. Such an action is also seen in Plain-backed Pipit but not so frequently as with Long-tailed Pipit.

Most pipits will wag their tail. Some move their whole body, others merely move the tail. Some species flick their tail down as their first tail movement whilst others will first jerk the tail up. It would appear that each species has its own normal behaviour and although all have the capacity to occasionally depart from this and confuse the observer, this is not usually done repeatedly.

Now I am getting to the stage where I can identify most of my local species, including the two undescribed

ones, from a distance. Each species walks differently from the others and each has different head-feeding movements. Some walk slowly and deliberately, others have short or long runs. Some peck regularly, others peck almost like a wagtail with alternate steps. At this stage I have video footage of each of these common (and undescribed) pipits and I am trying to quantify their behaviours.

Another aspect of pipits of which we know little is the purpose and function of the different aspects of their anatomy, for example the length of the hindclaw. It was assumed that the very long hindclaw of Long-tailed Pipit meant that the species occurred mainly on short grass and indeed it has been found on the floodplains of northern Botswana on migration (probably to the floodplains in Zambia). The hindclaw of the 'new' Long-billed Pipit is relatively long compared to conventional Long-billed Pipit. Does this new undescribed species also occur on floodplains and if so where does one start to look for it?

What is the meaning of the length of the bill? Why are some primary feathers notched and others not, and what do the differences indicate? Is the outer tail feather pattern a good species indicator or a sex indicator to each other? Indeed, are such tail feathers a reliable and regular feature for each species because there does appear to be considerable intraspecific variation?

As for the commonly used field character of the lower mandible's coloration—yellow or pink—I have photographs of the same individual, one facing left showing a pink lower mandible and the same bird facing right showing a yellow lower mandible. The same colour differences in the legs can also play tricks through different lighting. At least for me, such characters are not very reliable even when using a telescope which is an essential tool for watching pipits.

Patently one cannot go into the field and hope to identify pipits with the use of a portable DNA-identity kit or a portable sonogram system. Equally plainly, we cannot continue to identify pipits only by using plumage details. The subtleties of plumage pattern differences or otherwise, the size and proportions of the bill, length of leg and even the length of the hindclaw all show clearly that old methods are inadequate for safe field identification of pipits. Yet pipits are able, not only to distinguish their own species, but also to decide whether the other bird is a male or female. If they can do it, we should be able to work out how and follow their example!

Inevitably one must come to the question—what is a species? No matter how difficult it is for humans to distinguish the different species of pipits—and the

DNA of laboratory work will inevitably influence our decisions—we must endeavour to find a new and better system for field identification than presently exists. I do not believe we know how to separate most species in the field and I do not believe many trusted identifications can really be considered reliable. So whilst one can sympathise with Keith *et al*<sup>1</sup>, it is wrong that we allow, in this day and age, such an attitude to continue—simply because nobody looks at pipits properly!

Every profession has its idiosyncracies. In avian taxonomy it is that, were it not for the International Zoological Commission (IZC) regulations, I could include in this article photographs of an undescribed species that I shall refer to as the Kimberly Long-billed Pipit. It took a whole winter season to distinguish this bird in the field, so similar is it to both *A. similis* and *A. cinnamomeus* (*A. novaeseelandiae cinnamomeus* in *Birds of Africa*). Finally a specimen helped to confirm the photographs. Alas this omission is perhaps more a reflection on human nature than the IZC.

What we need is sponsorship for a small team of ornithologists to follow Admiral Lynes' example but

this time reviewing the genus *Anthus* in Africa. Alas that I were younger and able—but would it not be progress to be able to identify these birds in the field and really understand these little critters? ?

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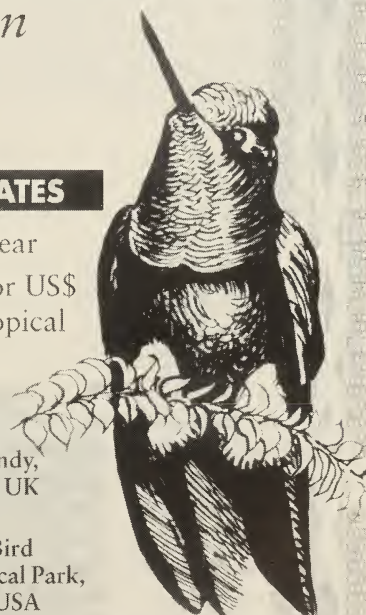
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# Field studies on the Black Parrot *Coracopsis nigra* in western Madagascar

Arndt Hampe

Certains aspects de la biologie du Perroquet noir *Coracopsis nigra* ont été étudiés pendant la période post-nuptiale, dans une forêt primaire sèche dans l'ouest de Madagascar, en 1994. À l'aide de layons, des données ont été recueillies concernant la recherche de la nourriture, le régime alimentaire, les patterns d'activité quotidiens, le répertoire vocal et le comportement social. L'espèce est essentiellement frugivore et paraît jouer un rôle important comme disperseuse de semences, mais se tourne vers les fleurs et les bourgeons dès que l'approvisionnement en fruits diminue. Les perroquets ne présentent pas de patterns d'activité quotidiens réguliers, sauf en ce qui concerne des périodes d'activité vocale élevée au lever et au coucher du jour, et une période pendant laquelle ils se chauffent au soleil et font leur toilette, juste après l'aube. Les activités nocturnes s'avèrent rares. L'espèce est relativement bruyante. Des cris de contact de courte et de longue distance, ainsi que des cris d'alarme ou d'agression sont décrits. Des imitations, qui ont été rapportées pour des oiseaux captifs, n'ont jamais été observées. Des perroquets à la recherche de nourriture ou d'un dortoir forment régulièrement des petits groupes comprenant jusqu'à dix individus. De mi-février à fin-mars, ni groupes familiaux, ni jeunes indépendants n'ont été observés, indiquant que la période de reproduction commence avant décembre, donc plus tôt que ne le décrit la littérature.

The genus *Coracopsis* consists of the two most primitive species of African parrots, Greater Vasa Parrot *C. vasa* and Black or Lesser Vasa Parrot *C. nigra*<sup>9</sup>. Both are restricted to Madagascar and the Comoro Islands, except for a small endangered population of *nigra* on Praslin Island, Seychelles<sup>12</sup>. Both are listed in Annex II of the CITES Convention.

There have apparently been no field studies on Black Parrot (except for those on Praslin Island<sup>7,13</sup>) and our poor knowledge of their biology elsewhere is principally gleaned from a few anecdotal reports made as a result of scientific expeditions<sup>1,8,15</sup>. Some studies of captive *Coracopsis* have concentrated on their breeding biologies. An apparent polygyny and the development of a penis-like cloaca during the breeding period are considered to be unique within the Psittaciformes<sup>3,7,17,19,20</sup>.

Black Parrot is reported to be less common and more restricted to closed woodlands than Greater Vasa Parrot, which is common in open cultivated areas throughout the Madagascan lowlands<sup>14,15</sup>. Here I add to the biological knowledge of the Black Parrot in the wild. During three weeks in the early post-breeding period I systematically collected data on the species' activity patterns, food and foraging behaviour, acoustic communication, and social behaviour.

## Study area and methods

The Forêt de Krinidy, a 100 km<sup>2</sup> concession of the Centre de Formation Professionnelle Forestière de Morondava (CFPF) is located c60 km north of

Morondava in western Madagascar. The climate is tropical with a mean annual rainfall of 770 mm and an intense dry season from April–October<sup>10</sup>. The vegetation consists of primary deciduous dry forest. Canopy height averages 12–15 m and sometimes reaches 20 m. For a detailed description of the area see Ganzhorn & Sorg<sup>11</sup>. My study was conducted between 28 February–21 March 1994. Birds in the study area were recorded using line transects<sup>2</sup>. Six transects, each 1 km-long, were established along narrow straight forest routes. Transect counts were conducted over a period of 30 mins and were performed systematically throughout the day. A total of 106 counts was made from 05.30–19.00 hrs (see Table 1). The minimum interval between two counts on the same transect was three hours.

Each parrot observation was recorded with the following data: time and calls, and, for sight records, the activity, height of birds above ground-level and group size were all noted. The call types were classified according to Thielcke<sup>18</sup>. Activities were categorised as follows: foraging, flight and non-locomotory behaviour. The latter category was further subdivided into: resting, sunning, preening and 'sit and call' (resting with persistent calling). For feeding observations, I recorded the food type and plant species.

For analysis of daily patterns I used only those transect data from T1–T4. Other quantitative results refer to all six transects. Non-quantitative results and general descriptions include supplemental observations from a simultaneous study commenced in mid-February 1994<sup>4,5</sup>.



Views of the study area, Forêt de Kirindy, western Madagascar, 1994 (Arndt Hampe)

A total of 1,515 observations of 1,706 birds was recorded. Of these, 245 sight records concerned 388 individuals; 187 sightings with 262 activity data were analysed referring to the daily activity patterns, and data on foraging included 36 observations of 69 birds. Finally during the sight observations, a total of 334 call-only records were made.

## Results

### 1. Daily activity patterns

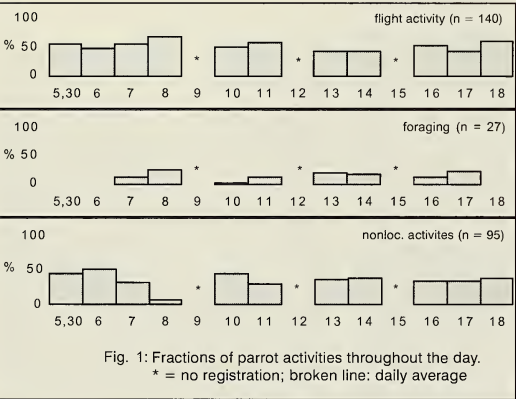
The recorded parrot observations showed a strong morning peak about sunrise and a weaker afternoon peak (Table 2). Activities are recorded in Fig. 1.

On a few occasions, the first calls were registered before dawn (c.05.30 hrs). Around sunrise (c06.10

hrs) calling activity peaked. Just after dawn a period of preening and sunning commenced, which, except on one occasion, ended at 07.15 hrs. During this period, small groups of up to ten birds formed in the tops of dead trees (mean height 13.5 m). Thereafter, flight activities increased and at 07.10 hrs the first feeding was recorded. Between 08.00–09.00 hrs the proportion of resting or preening birds dropped to nearly zero, whereas flight and foraging activities reached their daily peaks. During most of the rest of the day the different activities did not show significant patterns. The last foraging observation occurred at 17.56 hrs. Few sightings were made before 06.00 hrs and after 18.00 hrs despite high call activity which suggests that during the night the species used less conspicuous sites than

Table 1. Number of transect counts throughout the day (T 1–6 = transect routes). Each hour was divided into two 30-min census units that were performed on different days.

hour	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	total
05.30–06.00	1	1	1	1	-	-	4
06.00–07.00	2	2	2	2	2	2	12
07.00–08.00	2	2	2	2	2	2	12
08.00–09.00	2	2	2	2	2	2	12
10.00–11.00	2	2	2	2	-	-	8
11.00–12.00	2	2	2	2	-	-	8
13.00–14.00	2	2	2	2	-	-	8
14.00–15.00	2	2	2	2	-	-	8
16.00–17.00	2	2	2	2	2	2	12
17.00–18.00	2	2	2	2	2	2	12
18.00–19.00	2	2	2	2	1	1	10
total counts	21	21	21	21	11	11	106



at day roosts. Nocturnal activities, previously described in the literature<sup>1,16</sup>, were only noted exceptionally.

## 2. Foraging behaviour and food

Parrots foraged alone or in small groups of up to five individuals (mean 1.9 birds). Foraging birds stayed at a mean height of 10.7 m, significantly lower than during non-locomotory behaviour (Mann-Whitney:  $Z = -2.18$ ;  $p = 0.005$ ;  $n = 69$ ). During feeding, birds were normally silent or uttered soft short-distance contact calls (see Acoustic Communication).

The parrots fed exclusively on plants (Fig. 2). In early March they took only the fruits of *Commiphora guillaumini* (Burseraceae), *Poupartia silvatica* (Anacardiaceae) and *Breonia perrieri* (Rubiaceae). The first two species produce drupes rich in fats, whereas *Breonia perrieri* has multi-seeded fruits with

Table 2. Parrot observations

hour	individuals seen	number of sight observations	call records
5,30	15	12	69
6	79	49	184
7	63	35	92
8	45	28	85
9			
10	38	21	103
11	18	13	85
12			
13	19	13	87
14	11	9	89
15			
16	51	32	80
17	29	21	86
18	20	12	121
sum	388	245	1081

a high content of soluble carbohydrates (pers. obs.). The seeds were partially broken down in the bill (*Commiphora*, probably also *Poupartia*) or swallowed (*Breonia*). At *Poupartia* trees, the parrots had to retreat from the competition of lemurs *Eulemur fulvus* and *Propithecus verreauxi* on two occasions, whereas at the other tree species no interactions with other species were observed.

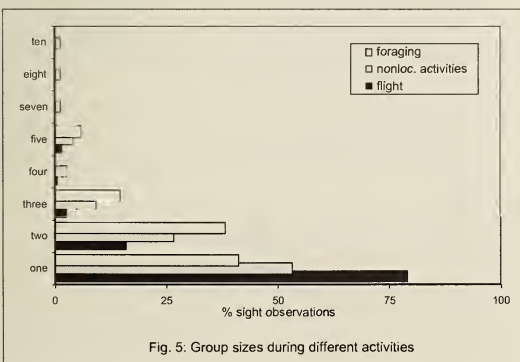
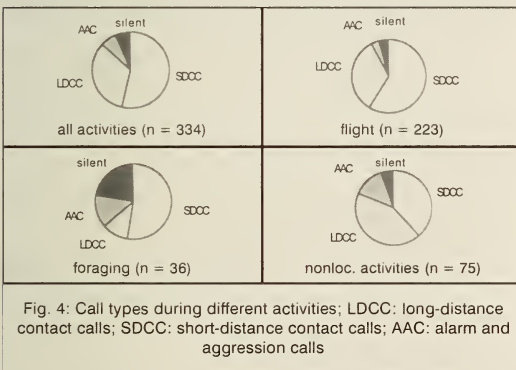
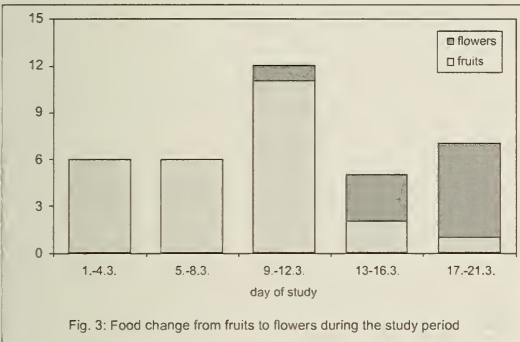
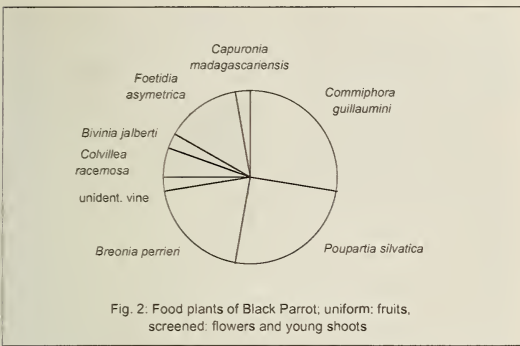
With diminishing fruit supplies, observations of birds feeding on flowers and young shoots increased. The following species were taken: *Capuronia madagascariensis* (Mimosaceae), *Colvillea racemosa* (Caesalpiniaceae), *Foetidia asymetrica* (Lecythiaceae), *Bivinia jalberti* (Flacourtiaceae) and an unidentified woody vine species. The food change from fruit to flowers (Fig. 3) showed a highly significant trend in time ( $c^2$ -Test:  $c^2 = 21.15$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ;  $n = 36$ ).

## 3. Acoustic communication

The species was relatively noisy: calling was recorded in 91.4% of all sight observations. Calling activity was highest in the mornings and much less pronounced in the evening (Table 2). Calls were classified according to three clearly distinguishable functional types.

### A. Long-distance contact calls (LDCC)

The most striking call type consisted of motifs of 3–4 shrill fluty tones, often continually repeated. The maximum audible distance over which these were heard was more than 500 m. Three main motifs were



identified, one *wee too wee jio* being far the commonest. The main motifs varied in many ways: mainly by omitting or adding syllables, or altering the modulation and sometimes by linking the simple motif.

Calling birds were often found sitting more or less conspicuously in the canopy (engaged in non-locomotory activity 'sit and call': Fig 4). Particularly in the morning and evening they regularly performed 'concerts': these being calling contacts between two or more birds, sometimes over distances of several hundred metres and lasting up to ten mins or more. During these contacts the parrots often synchronised their call motifs. Call frequency was c3–5 per min (higher in excited birds).

Long-distance contact calls were also regularly recorded in individuals seen flying high over the canopy, and, more rarely, during intraspecific aggression.

## B. Short-distance contact call (SDCC)

During foraging and preening, or in flying groups, soft croaking short-distance contact calls were regularly recorded (Fig. 4). The normal type was a short monosyllabic call with a maximum audible distance of a few dozens of metres. Only during intraspecific aggression was it linked, becoming louder and occasionally rising to the same intensity as croaking aggression calls.

## C. Alarm and aggression calls

The third type of calls consisted of a loud croaking, resembling that of African Grey Parrot *Psittacus erithacus*, although less harsh. The most common variant was monosyllabic. It was used principally as an alarm call. Sometimes calls of this type were recorded from parrots during 'sit and call' activity, and seemed to be connected with heightened excitement. Persistent croaking was recorded only in highly irritated or mobbed birds.

## 4. Social behaviour

The group sizes during roosting (mean = 2.0) and foraging (mean = 1.8) did not differ significantly, while flight activity was connected with significantly smaller groups (mean 1.3) than the other activities (Mann-Whitney:  $Z = -5.04$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ;  $n = 279$ ) (Fig. 5).

During the entire field period, from mid-February, no observations suggested that family groups or independent young were being recorded. Roosting groups usually dispersed by the successive departure of single birds or pairs. Only on one occasion was a parrot fed by another bird during foraging.

## Discussion

Black Parrots did not exhibit significant daily activity patterns, except for a period of intense preening and sunning before the start of foraging activity and intense calling activities ('concerts') in the morning and evening.

At the beginning of the study, the species was exclusively a frugivore but switched to other foods with decreasing food supplies. Foraging birds formed small groups compared to the flocks of up to c50 birds found in plantations<sup>12</sup> and could be a result of the fact that the most important fruits ripened successively and individual trees offered only small quantities simultaneously (for *Cammiphora guillaumini* see<sup>4,5,6</sup>). The species is one of four mainly frugivorous species of bird in the study area and appears to be an important seed-disperser for several key tree species of western Madagascan forests<sup>4,5</sup>.

Acoustic communication plays an important role in social behaviour. In the long-distance calls, the parrots demonstrated a high capacity for modulation and synchronisation. However, imitations as reported in captive birds<sup>16</sup>, were not recorded.

Captive breeding studies have shown that the breeding cycle of this species takes 2.5 months from egg-laying until the young become independent<sup>16</sup>. My failure to record families or independent young from mid-February onwards suggests that the breeding period starts prior to December, earlier than previously described<sup>15,16</sup>. Finally, a pair-group fraction of 20.3% of all observations did not point to permanent adult pairing in the post-breeding period.

Outside tall dry forest, I never recorded parrot abundances as high as that in the study area. This suggests that, although the species is recorded in other habitats, primary dry forest appears to be the preferred habitat in western Madagascar during the early post-breeding period. In the study area, which was subject to low hunting activity, the parrots were relatively tame, as has been described by other authors<sup>8,9</sup>, whereas outside this area the species was markedly shyer, suggesting that it suffers from more serious hunting pressure elsewhere.

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Black Parrot *Coracopsis nigra* (H. Mueller / VIREO)

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# Some comments on the identification of six Madagascar raptors

Pete Morris<sup>a</sup> and Frank Hawkins<sup>b</sup>

L'article traite de deux problèmes d'identification auxquels les ornithologues visitant Madagascar se trouvent confrontés. Premièrement l'identification de la Buse de Madagascar *Buteo brachypterus* et du Gymnogène de Madagascar *Polyboroides radiatus*. Deuxièmement celle des trois *Accipiter* de l'île, l'Autour de Henst *Accipiter henstii*, l'Épervier de Madagascar *A. madagascariensis* et l'Épervier de Frances *A. francesiae*, ainsi que de celle du rare Aigle serpenteur malgache *Eutriorchis astur*. L'identification des *Accipiter* en particulier constitue un réel défi et certains sujets doivent être identifiés avec beaucoup de précaution, étant donné le peu de caractéristiques de plumage concluantes. L'information présentée dans cet article est basée sur des observations sur le terrain et l'examen de peaux, et provient du guide photographique des oiseaux de Madagascar que les auteurs ont récemment publié. Les photos sont également tirées de cet ouvrage.

The authors have recently published a new photographic guide to the birds of Madagascar. The information presented in this paper is taken from *Birds of Madagascar: a photographic guide* (Morris & Hawkins 1998) and is a result of several years of collective field studies by the authors, in addition to several weeks spent studying specimens in museums in Britain, France and Madagascar.

## Introduction

There are few major bird identification problems in Madagascar. Here, we provide information on two of the more testing challenges facing birders. Firstly the identification of Madagascar Buzzard *Buteo brachypterus* and Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk *Aviceda madagascariensis* is discussed. The second part of the paper deals with the identification of the three species of accipiter and, to a lesser extent, the similar Madagascar Serpent-Eagle *Eutriorchis astur*. The accipiters in particular are an identification challenge and extreme care is needed to identify some individuals as there are few conclusive plumage features.

## 1. Identification of Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk and Madagascar Buzzard

Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk and Madagascar Buzzard are two very similar species which appear to display mimicry in plumage. The coverage of the identification of these species has been rather weak in the literature. On plumage criteria alone they are exceedingly difficult to identify: most visitors to Madagascar are faced with a very difficult identification challenge and little reference material to help. Both species are distributed widely. Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk is found in all types of forest including evergreen, dry deciduous, spiny and

secondary (including patches far from primary forest, such as those on the high plateau) throughout the country although it is generally scarce and seldom seen. It appears to be most common in southern forests, being rather rare in evergreen humid forest. It is found from sea-level to c1,600 m. Madagascar Buzzard occurs commonly in primary and secondary forest, areas of woodland and high rocky slopes throughout the island except on the largely deforested high plateau where it is rare. It is found from sea-level to 2,300 m.

Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk is a medium-sized raptor (45–48 cm). The sexes and all known plumages are alike although there is considerable individual variation. The following description is of a typical individual: head brown with a short crest on the nape which is not usually visible in the field. The upperparts are uniform dark brown with darker feather centres. Throat usually brown with an indistinct darker mesial stripe. Rest of underparts typically bright white with variable rufous mottling on the breast and flanks, often forming an irregular broad dark band across the breast. Tail brown with three broad dark bands visible from the underside. In flight, shows relatively short broad wings which are held forward with noticeably bulging secondaries. The upperparts appear relatively uniform dark brown with three broad dark bars in the tail. When the tail is spread, two white bands formed by white inner webs to the tail feathers are visible. The underwings are conspicuously barred dark brown across the coverts and flight feathers. The iris is conspicuously large and yellowish in colour although darker in immatures. The bill is dark brown and the (shortish) legs and feet yellowish grey.

Madagascar Buzzard is a medium-large (48–51 cm), broad-winged and short-tailed *Buteo*. Sexes are alike although there is extensive plumage variation

between individuals. The following description is of a typical individual: head grey-brown, upperparts and upperside of wings uniform brown. Rump white or brown, tail grey-brown with around six indistinct narrow darker bands. Individuals with typical underparts have a white throat streaked brown, white breast irregularly marked with brown, brown lower breast and belly with some white on the lower belly and vent. When soaring, the wings are held above the horizontal in typical *Buteo* fashion. The underwings show weak barring on the flight feathers with a markedly darker tip, more prominent barring on the greater-coverts, a dark mark at the carpal joint and solidly brown lesser-coverts which usually appear as a dark band, striking in flight. The iris is pale yellow, duller in immatures, the cere bluish grey, the bill black and the rather long legs and feet yellowish white. There is wide individual variation in plumage in both adults and immatures, and atypical individuals may be substantially paler or darker.

The two species differ in habits providing one of the best initial clues to identification. Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk is typically rather unobtrusive and often crepuscular. It generally hunts from a perch within the canopy. It feeds on small reptiles and insects in the foliage. It may rob nests. It is usually seen at the forest edge and around clearings and may be seen hunting in the canopy when it often appears to 'crash' into the foliage in pursuit of prey. It is sometimes seen soaring although the species is more often seen flying between forest blocks over open country with rather weak, wavering flight. The characteristic display consists of three or four flickering wing-beats undertaken while the bird turns with wings held vertically. It is a generally quiet species: the voice is unknown although a weak two-note whistle is thought to be given by this species (PM pers. obs.). By contrast, Madagascar Buzzard is a common, conspicuous and noisy species. It is usually seen alone or in pairs, often perching prominently and soaring over forest with wings held above the horizontal. The species feeds mainly on small vertebrates including reptiles, amphibians, rodents and small and medium-sized birds. The call is loud and frequently given, especially when soaring. It is best described as a loud mewing *meee-uuw* typical of the genus.

The two species are superficially very similar in appearance and must be separated with care using a number of subtle, although once learnt distinctive, features. Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk is smaller, slimmer and longer-tailed than Madagascar Buzzard which appears stocky with long broad wings and a short tail. At rest, the rounded head (with a short crest which is not usually visible) and the unusually large bulging eyes of the Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk give the species an

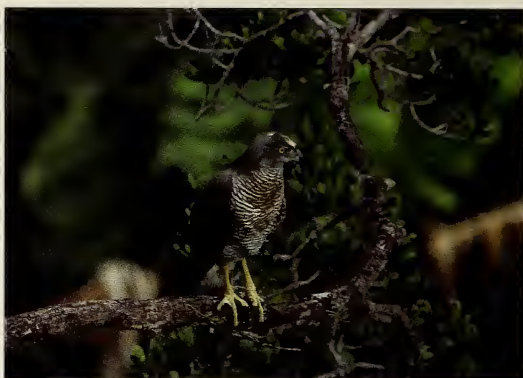
appearance quite unlike Madagascar Buzzard which has the jizz of a typical *Buteo*. In addition the longish tail of Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk is often held slightly open presenting a notched effect due to the large, rounded outertail feathers overlapping and the three broad dark bars on the tail may be apparent, whilst the long wings (with a noticeably large primary extension) nearly reach the tail tip. Madagascar Buzzard by comparison appears shorter tailed (usually appearing square) and shorter winged, and the tail usually shows 6–7 fine dark bars. In flight, the entire underwings of Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk, and importantly the primaries, are heavily barred (blackish and white) lacking the contrasting darker tip to the primaries often shown by Madagascar Buzzard. This is the single best and most easily seen character for separating these species on the wing. In addition the lesser- and median-underwing-coverts lack the dark bar typically shown by Madagascar Buzzard and the differences in tail pattern are often apparent on flying birds. The patterning on the underparts of the two species also differs in many individuals. Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk typically shows a band of rufous mottling across the breast and a white belly while the brownish throat often shows a more or less distinct darker mesial streak. By contrast, Madagascar Buzzard typically shows more extensive darker markings on the belly. This difference may, however, be difficult to assess in the field. In addition, when seen perched at close range, Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk appears short-legged with little or no bare tarsus visible. Madagascar Buzzard usually appears longer legged with obvious bare tarsi.

## 2. Identification of Madagascar accipiters and Madagascar Serpent-Eagle

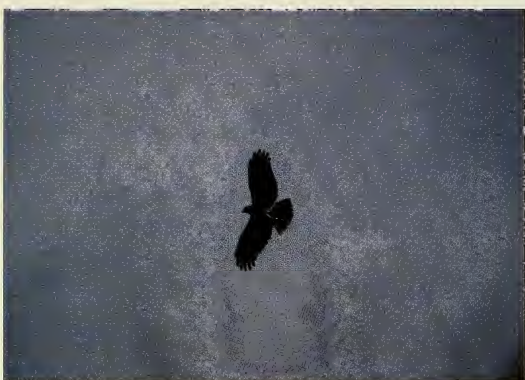
The three species of *Accipiter* occurring on Madagascar have never been treated in detail in the literature and consequently are frequently confused by visitors, leaving the impression that they are all easy to see. In reality, two are considerably rarer than the other one. The three species are Frances's Sparrowhawk *Accipiter francesi*, Madagascar Sparrowhawk *A. madagascariensis* and Henst's Goshawk *A. bensti*. All are present in western and eastern primary forests. Henst's Goshawk is scarce or absent from the south where Madagascar Sparrowhawk may be more common. Frances's Sparrowhawk is often common in secondary habitats, sometimes far from forest, but the other species are more restricted to primary forest and its environs. Frances's Sparrowhawk is the commonest, by a factor of ten in many areas. Madagascar Sparrowhawk is uncommon, except in some areas of the south although even here they are relatively scarce



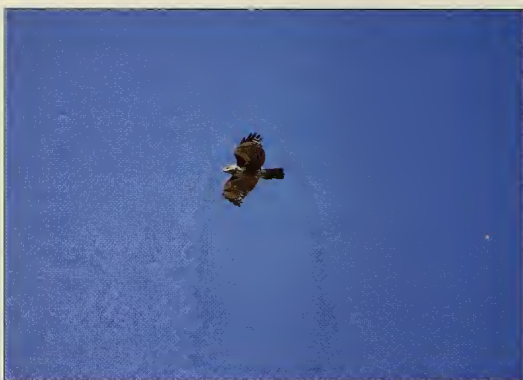
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11

- 1 Adult Henst's Goshawk *Accipiter bensti* (Gavin & Val Thomson)
- 2 Adult Henst's Goshawk *Accipiter bensti* (Russell Thorstrom)
- 3 Adult Madagascar Cuckoo-hawk *Aviceda madagascariensis* in flight (Frank Hawkins)
- 4 Female Madagascar Buzzard *Buteo brachypterus* in flight (Simon Harrap)
- 5 Adult Madagascar Cuckoo-hawk *Aviceda madagascariensis* (Pete Morris)
- 6 Female Madagascar Buzzard *Buteo brachypterus* (Pete Morris)
- 7 Female Frances's Sparrowhawk *Accipiter francesi* (Pete Morris)
- 8 Male Frances's Sparrowhawk *Accipiter francesi* (Jeff Blinow)
- 9 Adult Madagascar Serpent-eagle *Eutriorchis astur* (Russell Thorstrom)
- 10 Female Madagascar Sparrowhawk *Accipiter madagascariensis* (Russell Thorstrom)
- 11 Female Madagascar Sparrowhawk *Accipiter madagascariensis* (Russell Thorstrom)

Plates 1–11 are all reproduced with kind permission of Pica Press.

and difficult to see. Large female Henst's Goshawks are easy to separate purely on size (but are difficult to separate from Madagascar Serpent-Eagles—an identification challenge later treated here). Adult male Frances's Sparrowhawk is small with largely unmarked white (sometimes tinged pink) underparts with only faint rufous-orange barring rendering them immediately recognisable. All other plumages, sexes and ages are difficult to distinguish. This paper treats each species and discusses the key identification characters.

Frances's Sparrowhawk is a small *Accipiter* (28–35 cm), smaller than European Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* and about the size of Sharp-shinned Hawk *A. striatus* of the New World. Young birds are brown above, with a pale mark in front of the eye and sometimes a narrow pale supercilium which may just join the pale spots on the back of the neck / nape. The underparts are whitish with rather wide mid-brown barring, individual bars often presenting the impression that they are darker at the margins than in the centre. There is a fairly conspicuous dark mesial stripe. The undertail-coverts show two or three narrow pale brown bars, less conspicuous than those on the breast. The uppersides of the central tail feathers are unbarred. Feathers of the upperparts show inconspicuous pale fringes which are difficult to discern in the field. The legs and feet are long but not markedly so. Adult female Frances's Sparrowhawk is similar to the immature but is tinged evenly grey on the head and nape, forming a slight grey hood, and usually lacks the pale spots in front of the eye and on the nape. It is typically rather darker brown on the back than the young bird (lacking the indistinct pale fringes), and the barring on the breast is darker and may appear narrower. The mesial stripe is more obscure but usually present; the throat is otherwise uniform off-white with a few indistinct, brown streaks. The undertail-coverts show barring similar to young birds.

Madagascar Sparrowhawk is a small to medium-sized *Accipiter* (29–40 cm) which shows great variation in size between sexes. Small males are not much bigger than male Frances's Sparrowhawk, whilst large females are almost the size of male Henst's Goshawk, but less powerfully built. Young Madagascar Sparrowhawk is typically dark earth-brown above, with a pale spot in front of the eye and pale white nape-spots. The underparts are streaked (rather than barred), some of the brown streaks on the breast widening into narrow ovals. Adult male and female Madagascar Sparrowhawks are very similar in plumage and are treated together here. They are rather dark grey-brown above, the male slightly darker, with a slight slate tinge in some lights

(this may also be apparent in older (?) females). The breast is whitish barred narrowly darker, the bars being almost blackish. The throat is white with fine, blackish striations across its width, each streak having very narrow lateral extensions. The undertail-coverts are typically white. The feet are remarkably long and spindly, especially the central toe which projects almost a centimetre beyond the others. Overall, Madagascar Sparrowhawk is a relatively weakly built species, being rather small-headed, long-winged with long slender legs and a relatively fine bill.

Henst's Goshawk is almost identical in plumage to Madagascar Sparrowhawk in all plumages. However, they are very large and powerful accipiters, especially large females. The male is substantially smaller, however, and a small male may be little larger than a female Madagascar Sparrowhawk. The major differences between the plumages of Henst's Goshawk and Madagascar Sparrowhawk are that the throat of the former looks barred or mottled rather than streaked, with the lateral extensions on streaks mentioned on the throat pattern of Madagascar Sparrowhawk being more strongly marked in the streaks on Henst's, forming a barred or chequered pattern. Henst's Goshawk tends to show slightly paler upperparts than Madagascar Sparrowhawk and does not show the slate tinge to the upperparts present in some individuals of the latter species. In addition, the undertail-coverts of Henst's Goshawks show slight and variable barring. Henst's Goshawk has a very loud and characteristic call, an angry barking *angk-angk-angk-angk-angk-angk-angk*, which is often given in flight and has a similar quality to a small dog. This is the most frequent means of detecting the species.

When confronted by a medium-sized perched *Accipiter* with barred underparts, the following key points should be noted, in order of importance: (a) undertail-coverts pattern (barred, albeit slightly, in Frances's and Henst's, unbarred in Madagascar); (b) throat pattern (barred or mottled in Henst's, narrowly streaked in Madagascar and with a single more or less obvious dark central streak in Frances's); (c) the colour of the upperparts (often darkest in Madagascar, the only species likely to show a dark slate tone to the upperparts); (d) the pattern of barring and ground colour of the underparts (Frances's tends to show off-white underparts with relatively broad brown bars, especially in immatures, Madagascar shows the whitest underparts with crisp, narrow dark bars whilst the barring on Henst's tends to be slightly browner and closer than Madagascar); (e) relative length of the toes (relatively short in Frances's and Henst's, unusually long and spindly in Madagascar). For a streak-breasted

(immature) *Accipiter*, criterion (e) is the only one of any use, except that a Madagascar Sparrowhawk will generally look slim and small compared to the almost eagle-like proportions of Henst's Goshawk. Frances's Sparrowhawk shows barred underparts in all plumages (often indistinct in the adult male) and never shows the streak-breasted immature plumages of the other two species.

Madagascar Serpent-Eagle is similar to, although slightly larger than, Henst's Goshawk (the size difference is probably not easy to appreciate in the field) and this pair of species poses another serious identification challenge. The serpent-eagle is a rare resident in eastern and north-eastern forests, with most recent records coming from the Masoala peninsula. Madagascar Serpent-Eagle differs from adult Henst's Goshawk in the following ways: (a) it shows dark barring on the upperwing, especially on the primaries and tertials, whereas Henst's are more uniform; (b) overall, Madagascar Serpent-Eagle is rather warmer dark brown on the back, whereas Henst's Goshawk is dark grey-brown; (c) the head of Madagascar Serpent-Eagle is more massive than Henst's Goshawk, with a short, rather shaggy crest recalling a *Spilornis* eagle. The feathers of the rear crown and nape are often tipped white (more markedly in juveniles) with internal black barring; (d) Madagascar Serpent-Eagle's bill lacks the characteristic *Accipiter* notch; (e) Madagascar Serpent-Eagle is distinctly longer-tailed than Henst's Goshawk; (e) the underparts of the two species are rather similar, but the barring on the breast of Madagascar Serpent-Eagle is duller and paler brown and somewhat more widely spaced. In addition, in flight, Madagascar Serpent-Eagle has a rather floppy flight compared to the powerful direct progress of Henst's

Goshawk, and the surprisingly long tail of the serpent-eagle is noticeable. The 'song' of Madagascar Serpent-Eagle is highly characteristic and is very different to the Henst's Goshawk calls described above. Usually delivered from a favoured perch or 'song tree', it is a slow sequence of three to ten loud barking *arnk* notes usually ending in a single lower note, *wugh*. Each note in the series is separated from the next by 1–1.5 s.

## Conclusion

It is hoped that careful application of the characters described above will permit the correct identification of a majority of individuals of these difficult species. However, it must be stressed that, to correctly identify some individuals exceptionally good views will be required and some individuals will always best remain unidentified. Finally, the authors would welcome comments from any readers which updates or corrects material presented here and in *Birds of Madagascar: a photographic guide*.

## Acknowledgements

The photographs accompanying this paper are taken from *Birds of Madagascar: a photographic guide* (Morris & Hawkins 1998) and the authors would like to sincerely thank Russell Thorstrom, Simon Harrap, Rob Morris, Jeff Blincow and Gavin and Val Thomson for permitting them to reproduce their excellent photographs here. 📷

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<sup>b</sup>Projet ZICOMA, BirdLife International, BP 1074, Antananarivo 101, Madagascar.

# A record of an immature Ovambo Sparrowhawk

## *Accipiter ovampensis* from Ivory Coast

Volker Salewski

La capture d'un Épervier de l'Ovambo *Accipiter ovampensis* immature au Parc National de la Comoé, Côte d'Ivoire, en Septembre 1997, est analysée à la lumière des observations relativement peu nombreuses de cette espèce dans l'Ouest africain. Des données biométriques de cet individu sont présentées. L'auteur estime que l'espèce pourrait être plus fréquente en Afrique de l'Ouest que ne l'indique la littérature.



Immature Ovambo Sparrowhawk *Accipiter ovampensis*, at Comoé National Park, Ivory Coast, 26 September 1997 (Volker Salewski)

Ovambo Sparrowhawk *Accipiter ovampensis* is widespread in southern Africa, where it is known to breed in Angola, Zambia, Malawi, Botswana, Zimbabwe and South Africa<sup>7</sup>, although it is nowhere abundant<sup>5</sup>. The only breeding records from East Africa are from north of the equator in Kenya<sup>5</sup> in May and September<sup>9</sup>. The species is believed to be an intra-African, partially transequatorial, migrant as it is largely absent from its South African range during the austral summer (December–February)<sup>11</sup> although there is evidence that some birds are resident there (R Davies pers. comm.). It occurs throughout the year in northern Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Transvaal, where breeding is reported from September–January<sup>2</sup>. In West Africa, the species is considered rare without firm evidence of breeding<sup>3,5,7,11</sup> and it has been postulated that it might only be a migrant there<sup>4</sup>. Dowsett & Forbes-Watson<sup>7</sup> list the species for Senegal (two recent records from the south of the country<sup>1</sup>), Sierra Leone (confirmation required), Ivory Coast, Ghana (rare migrant<sup>8</sup>), Bénin (resident, without firm



breeding records) and Nigeria (a migrant, without firm breeding records). Since 1991 when the first record was made, there have been an increasing number of occurrences in The Gambia, including two of juveniles, and all in June–December<sup>4</sup>. For Ivory Coast, Thiollay<sup>13</sup> gives ten records between 15 June–5 October in savanna habitat, some of them from Comoé National Park in the north-east of the country. At least one of these records (near Lamto) was an immature bird (J-M Thiollay pers. comm.). Demey & Fishpool<sup>6</sup> add three further records, one a subadult.

## New record

On 26 September 1997, whilst mist-netting in the south-west of Comoé National Park at c08°45'N 03°49'W, an immature Ovambo Sparrowhawk was caught. It was identified according to the following features: small head, heavy pointed dark bill, large feet, dark ear patches, pale supercilium, barred tail and cere turning red (R Davies pers. comm.). One adult feather had appeared on the breast indicating that the bird was c12 months-old (R Davies pers. comm.). Measurements of the bird were: wing 237 mm; tarsus 49.8 mm; weight, more than 200 g (the upper limit of my balance). The wing measurement falls between those given in Brown *et al*<sup>5</sup> for males (210–225 mm) and females 245–253 mm), whilst weights of males are given as 105–190 g (mean 140 g) and for females as 180–305 g (mean 260 g)<sup>5</sup>, perhaps suggesting that the bird I captured was a female. A blood sample was taken which is retained by A Helbig (Vogelwarte Hiddensee, Germany). The bird was caught on the edge of riparian forest fringing the Comoé river and close to savannah (the favoured habitat of the species in southern Africa<sup>9</sup>). Due to this preference for open habitats, the species has an unusual wingshape for an *Accipiter* with an almost falcon-like long outerwing<sup>7</sup>.

## Discussion

It is possible that the species is more abundant in West Africa than previously thought but has been overlooked for the following reasons: the density of birders in West Africa is much lower than in East or South Africa, the species is nowhere abundant<sup>8</sup> except in Transvaal, South Africa<sup>2</sup> and difficult to identify in the field<sup>1</sup> being, for example, very similar to the sympatric Gabar Goshawk *Melierax gabar*<sup>12</sup>.

A concentrated effort by observers in areas with sufficient and suitable habitat may reveal the species to be more common than previously suspected. It is not impossible that the species breeds in West Africa but has been overlooked. It appears surprising that many authorities<sup>2,3,9,10</sup> have suggested that the species is a transequatorial migrant although there is no confirmatory evidence for this supposition (eg ringing recoveries) which suggests that much additional research is required.

## Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Robert A G Davies who confirmed the identity of the bird, provided me with additional information, convinced me of the value of the observation and finally improved my English, and J-M Thiollay who provided some unpublished information. ☺

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# The conservation status of Echo Parakeet *Psittacula eques* of Mauritius

Mike Thorsen<sup>a</sup> and Carl Jones<sup>b</sup>

## Introduction and background

On human colonisation of Mauritius, three endemic species of parrot were noted: *Lophopsittacus mauritiana* a large, crested and heavy beaked grey parrot that became extinct around 1680, *Lophopsittacus bensoni* a smaller grey parrot that became extinct in the 1760s, and the still extant Echo Parakeet *Psittacula eques*<sup>1</sup>.

The Echo Parakeet is a medium-sized parakeet weighing 130–190 g. It is similar in size to the introduced Ring-necked Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* but is heavier, more solid in appearance and the tail is almost equal in length to the body. Echo Parakeets are also a darker green colour, have lower pitched calls, slower flight, and females have a dark beak. It has been treated as a subspecies of Ring-necked Parakeet but was considered specifically distinct by Jones<sup>4</sup>. This separation appears to be valid based on ecological observations and breeding biology. An investigation into the evolutionary divergence of the Indian Ocean *Psittacula* species is underway (J Groombridge pers. comm.).

Echo Parakeets are herbivorous, eating fruit, flowers, leaves, buds and bark of a wide range of species. They forage widely and target different plant species at certain times of the year<sup>5</sup>.

Nests are in cavities of emergent endemic trees. The clutch size is normally 2–3 eggs (range 1–4) which are laid from September–December. Eggs are laid at two-day intervals. Incubation starts with the first, or sometimes second, egg and lasts 21–25 days. Only females incubate. Chicks weigh between 8.5–11 g upon



Juvenile Echo Parakeet *Psittacula eques*, Mauritius, January 1997 (Robert Lucking)

hatching and grow quickly, peaking at around 170 g before fledging at c150 g, 53–63 days after they hatch. Two young is the maximum number known to fledge from a nest.

Echo Parakeets were formerly common on Mauritius but began to decline in numbers and range in the mid-1800s, until by 1986 the population was estimated at only 8–12 individuals<sup>5,6</sup>. They are now only found in c50 km<sup>2</sup> of remnant native upland forest<sup>6</sup>. This area is contained within the 7,000 ha Black River Gorges National Park created in 1993. No Echo Parakeets are present in any other area of Mauritius.

Only 1.27% of Mauritius' native forest remains<sup>3</sup>. This forest, which the Echo Parakeet inhabits, continues to be highly degraded by cyclones, the influence of past forestry practices and by the spread of exotic plants especially *Guava Psidium cattleianum*, *Privet Ligustrum robustum* and *Jamrosa Syzygium jambos*<sup>1,2,5,6</sup>. Many alien feral mammals are present including Ship Rat *Rattus rattus* and Norway Rat *Rattus norvegicus*, Macaque Monkeys *Macaca*



Black River Gorges National Park, Mauritius, January 1997 (Robert Lucking)

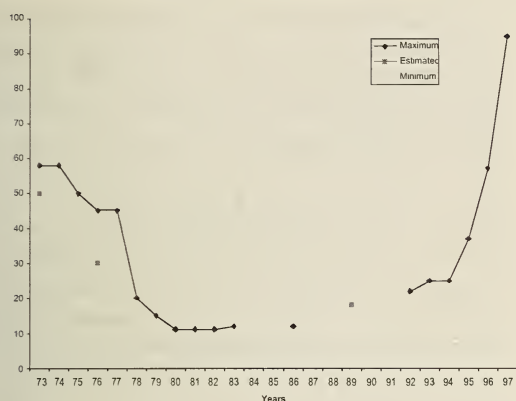


Fig. 1. Echo Parakeet *Psittacula eques* population trend<sup>5,7,8,11,12</sup>.

*fascicularis*, domestic Cats *Felis catus*, Mongooses *Herpestes auropunctatus*, Pigs *Sus scrofa* and Rusa Deer *Cervus timorensis*, which have a significant negative effect on indigenous flora and fauna<sup>1,5,6</sup>. Introduced Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* and Ring-necked Parakeet are nest site competitors with the Echo Parakeet<sup>1</sup>.

The decline of the Echo Parakeet has been attributed to habitat destruction and degradation, exotic predators, competition for nest cavities, seasonal food shortages, nest fly infestations and genetic/demographic reasons<sup>5,6</sup>.

Conservation efforts to recover the Echo Parakeet were initiated by the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation in 1973 and intensified in 1987. Many techniques have been used including habitat protection and improvement (fenced and weeded forest plots), rat control around nest sites, manipulation of nests, supplementary feeding and provision of nest boxes<sup>6</sup>.

Between 1993–1995, the programme was further refined and current efforts are based on this methodology. The main emphasis is now on predator control, nest cavity improvement, clutch manipulations and daily examination of active nests. As a result, Echo Parakeet is one of the most intensively managed avian species in the world.

Since the 1994–95 breeding season the minimum Echo Parakeet population has been increasing rapidly (by 47% in 1994–95, 47% in 1995–96, and 68% in 1996–97). At the end of the 1996–97 breeding season the total population was 84–95 individuals<sup>12</sup>. Forty chicks have now fledged from wild eggs in the past three breeding seasons. However, only 12 of these have fledged into the wild. The following is a more focused examination of the current threats to the Echo Parakeet and current conservation methodology.

## Population growth

The total Echo Parakeet population has grown quickly over the past three breeding seasons. A major reason for this is the intensive management programme.

The discovery of new breeding groups in recent years has also raised the population total. Some of these were almost certainly present in previous years but without intensive searching remained undetected.

A change in the proportion of breeding groups that attempt to breed each year has also played a role in the population increase. For the period 1973–1994 only 42–60% of the known breeding groups attempted to breed. Over the last three breeding seasons this figure has risen to 92%. The reason for the increase in breeding attempts is unknown. Current management techniques do not include methods for increasing the proportion of breeding groups. An increase in available food supply due to increasing utilisation of exotic species may be the answer. Prior to the 1994–95 breeding season exotic species comprised very few of feeding observations (4%<sup>5</sup>, 3% in 1993–94<sup>7</sup>). This contrasts with 26% in 1995–96<sup>11</sup>, and 31% in 1996–97<sup>12</sup>. Particularly important could be the exceedingly common Guava which can fruit very heavily in July–

Table 1. Wild Echo Parakeet *Psittacula eques* breeding summary since 1973<sup>5,6,8,11,12</sup>

Year	Number of known breeding groups	Number of groups laying eggs	Number of groups fledging young successfully	Number of young fledged
1973	-	7 (11)	2 (7)	2–4 (11)
1974	-11	-7	6 (4)	11 (5)
1975	-	6 (6)	1 (2)	2 (4)
1976	6–11 (-)	- (-)	3 (0)	5 (0)
1977	-	-	-	-
1978	3	1	0	0
1979	3	0	0	0
1980	2	1	0	0
1981	2	1	0	0
1982	1	0	0	0
1983	1–2	0	0	0
1987–88*	4	1	1	5
1988–89	4	1	0	0
1989–90*	4	2	2	5
1990–91*	4	3	2	5
1991–92*	4	3	3	7
1992–93*	5	2	1	4
1993–94	5	3	0	0
1994–95*	6	6	4	8
1995–96*	7	6	5	11
1996–97*	13	12	10	21

\* Figures include wild eggs and nestlings harvested and reared in captivity.

( ) a second estimate for the season.

September, when breeding initiation probably occurs in Echo Parakeets. A grove of introduced Starfruit *Averrhoa carambola* trees is much-utilised by Echo Parakeets from January–March<sup>15</sup>. This use of exotic food sources is a promising sign in that it could release Echo Parakeets from one of their major constraints—food shortage due to habitat deterioration. Rejuvenation of the breeding population by recruitment of young birds could also have increased the breeding proportion.

### The role of food supplies

Seasonal food shortages have often been discussed as one of the reasons for the Echo Parakeet's rarity<sup>5,6</sup>. Results from the past four breeding seasons suggest food shortage as the major cause of nest failure within the management programme. During successful breeding seasons, eg 1994–95, most breeding groups, managed or not, can successfully fledge young, but during 'normal' breeding seasons most nests fail or are only able to fledge a reduced number of young.

The reason for this food shortage is deterioration of the native forest. All areas where Echo Parakeets now breed contain only patches of native vegetation in a sea of Guava and Privet. While these exotics can provide a very abundant food source it is not available year-round or even throughout the breeding season. Normal fruiting levels of native species are patchy in distribution and frequency with only some species fruiting each year. This is demonstrated by the little overlap in native species recorded in feeding observations from breeding season to breeding season. Macaques also strip much of the fruit from trees, often before it ripens.

Cyclones can stimulate the native vegetation to fruit abundantly the following year, which increases breeding success

### Supplementary feeding

Supplementary feeding can be very useful in removing food limitations on breeding output. Most conservation programmes with a supplementary feeding component report an increase in breeding attempts (eg Kakapo *Strigops habroptilus*<sup>10</sup>, Seychelles Magpie-Robin *Copsychus sechellarum* (R Lucking pers. comm.) and of course the Mauritius Pink Pigeon *Nesoenas mayeri* and Mauritius Kestrel *Falco punctatus* (CJ pers. obs.). Supplementary feeding programmes have to be designed intelligently and monitored closely to avoid problems such as infertility, female burn-out and an increased disease risk, which are concerns

held by some wildlife managers. Attempts continue to introduce wild adults to supplementary food but with little success to date. Released captive-reared juveniles are trained to use supplementary food provided in parrot feeders—as used on the Kakapo project—which exclude other bird species and rats.

### Clutch manipulations and rescues

As part of the management programme, the first clutches of selected breeding groups are harvested to increase productivity via double clutching. Fostering of eggs and nestlings is also utilised to spread risks and circumvent parenting problems. Rescuing of at risk clutches and starving nestlings is very successful at maintaining productivity. This is an essential technique in years of poor food availability or adverse weather. Daily inspection of nestlings allows problems to be detected early and remedied. Harvesting eggs and rescuing clutches over the past three years has bolstered the captive population at the Gerald Durrell Endemic Wildlife Sanctuary (GDEWS).

### Management of nest cavities

Nest linings consisting of wood-shavings treated with a fungicide and insecticide are used in all accessible nest cavities. This has been very effective in that no nests are known to have failed due to nest-fly or fungal infestations in the past three seasons. In the 1993–94 season nest-fly predation was responsible for one of three nest failures. Aspergillosis infection has been noted as a cause of nest failure at GDEWS in the past<sup>8</sup>.

Many of the cavities used by Echo Parakeets are becoming old and unusable. There may be a lack of alternative cavities due to the limited numbers of mature cavity bearing trees in the highly degraded forest. Competition also exists for cavities (see Cavity competition). Weatherproofing and cavity maintenance are ongoing activities.

### Cavity competition

Competition for nest cavities appears high with 14–19% of Echo Parakeet nest cavities lost to competitors each year<sup>12</sup>. The main culprits are (in order of importance): Ring-necked Parakeet, Common Myna, White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus* and bees. Not included in the above figures are take-overs of cavities not actively in use or between breeding seasons. Termites and rats have been responsible for the former. Other potential nest competitors are wasps and Mauritius Kestrels.

Cavity loss due to cyclones and general deterioration due to age also takes its toll. Jones & Duffy<sup>6</sup> found

a loss of 18% per cavity year. Cavity maintenance as part of the management programme probably slows the rate of cavity loss due to deterioration as no cavities have been lost since the 1993–94 season. Two cavities (3.4% per cavity year) are known to have been lost in cyclones since 1987<sup>6,8</sup>. Temple (in Jones & Duffy<sup>6</sup>) describes nine of 23 (38%) cavities being destroyed in a cyclone in 1975.

Cavity competition may not yet be a limiting factor for the Echo Parakeet population as all known breeding groups are in possession of a cavity. If pressure to find breeding sites existed then some of the 57 nest boxes installed since 1974 should have been used, but none has yet been used by the species (pers. obs.). As the Echo Parakeet population increases, competition for nest sites will probably increase.

### Rodent control

The large number of rats present in the Mauritian forests will both predate eggs and nestlings and compete with Echo Parakeets for the limited food supplies available. Current efforts to control rats around nest sites centre on two techniques: a 200 m<sup>2</sup> poison grid centred on the nest site, or surrounding the cavity entrance with physically insurmountable PVC sheeting. The latter technique is still being developed and needs special care to be effective.

### Capture and banding

Capture of adult birds in the nest cavity as a technique has allowed the ringing of adults as well as fledged juveniles. The ringing programme has been invaluable in determining movements and breeding success of individuals and nest site occupation.

### Mortality and sex ratio of wild birds

Mortality of adult Echo Parakeets is very low. Only 4.2% per annum of banded females and no banded males have died, although these figures originate from a very small sample<sup>12</sup>. Jones & Duffy<sup>6</sup> also note higher mortality in females. This differential mortality if carried over several years could result in the bias of two males for every female in the population.

Juvenile mortality appears to be c20% per annum<sup>12</sup>. However, this has again been computed from a very small sample. There are no documented causes of mortality of adult birds. Jones<sup>5</sup> postulates direct (through destruction of birds in cavities) and indirect (starvation due to lowered food supply) cyclone-related mortality. A macaque has been observed carrying an adult Ring-necked Parakeet (S Roy pers. comm.).

Known causes of mortality of nestlings include ten instances of starvation, three instances each of disease, nest-fly parasitism, cavity take-over, desertion, and one instance each of drowning during a cyclone and growth abnormality<sup>12</sup>.

### The role of surplus males

Most breeding groups have 1–3 'surplus' males in attendance. Debate continues as to whether these extra males are 'helpers' or 'hinderers'. At the start of nesting, subdominant males are usually chased off by the dominant male or the female. As the season progresses and the parents are absent for longer periods of time, some of the extra males enter the nest cavity and feed the nestlings. Occasionally extra males are also known to feed the incubating female if the dominant male is absent. These extra feedings probably benefit both the female and the nestlings. However wild fledging success appears to be independent of group size and may in fact be more closely related to the dominant male's experience.

Some examples of hindrance are documented. Jones<sup>5</sup> quotes an instance when a male replaced the dominant male at a nest which then failed a week or so later. In the 1994–95 season, two newly hatched nestlings were found with their heads crushed either by an extra male or by Common Mynas (which were nesting 1 m below the cavity)<sup>8</sup>.

With only two recorded instances of hindrance the balance strongly favours surplus males being beneficial or neutral.

Surplus males at nests may be a recent phenomenon as it was not observed by F Staub in the 1960s or in two nests in 1971, but it was recorded by S Temple in the 1974 breeding season<sup>5</sup>. Jones<sup>5</sup> theorised that it was due either to the skewed sex ratio towards males or to non-breeding birds displaced by forest clearance. A skewed sex ratio probably encourages males to join a breeding group where they have a chance of securing either copulations or a mate by displacing the dominant male. Such displacement was observed in the 1995–96 season when the dominant male from a breeding group was held in captivity overnight. Before it was released the next day the other male had started attending and feeding the female. Once the male was released the normal dominance hierarchy was re-established<sup>11</sup>.

How the presence of the extra males is translated to helping behaviour such as feeding the nestling (feeding the female could be explained as a displaced courtship ritual) is unknown. Perhaps the males are simply responding to begging stimuli while hormone levels are high.

## Disease and inbreeding

Disease screening shows that diseases are either prevalent throughout the population (Polyoma Virus and Herpes Virus) or are entirely absent (Psittacene beak and feather disease, blood parasites) (A Greenwood pers. comm.). There is little evidence to date of inbreeding and fertility is 96%<sup>9</sup>, but the occurrence of a soft bone condition in some nestlings could be due to inbreeding.

## Releases of captive birds

The first release into the wild of three captive-reared Echo Parakeets successfully occurred in July 1997<sup>9</sup>. Most captive-reared individuals from eggs and nestlings removed from wild nests, supplemented by captive-bred individuals, will be released. These birds are taught to use supplementary feeding stations and nest boxes. It is hoped that they will in turn train wild individuals to use these by association. ♀

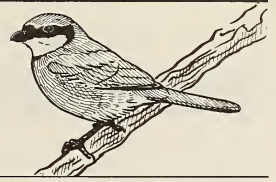
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## New breeding records of Verreaux's Eagle Owl *Buteo lacteus* in Bénin, West Africa

Patrick Claffey

Le Grand-duc de Verreaux *Buteo lacteus* est, en Afrique de l'Ouest, un résident peu abondant en habitat riverain: fréquent en Sénégal, mais rare, bien que peut-être passé inaperçu, au Mali, Ghana, Togo, Nigeria et Bénin. Peu de données concernant la reproduction sont disponibles dans la région. Au Bénin, l'auteur a observé une famille de quatre oiseaux dans la Forêt Classée de Wari Maro, en juin 1996, et un couple nichant sous les racines creuses d'un arbre dans la Ouémé à Bétérou, en février 1998. Deux œufs furent pondus à même le sable de la rivière, dans la cavité sous l'arbre. Malheureusement ceux-ci, ainsi qu'un des oiseaux, furent détruits par la suite.

Verreaux's Eagle Owl *Buteo lacteus* is a frequent and widespread resident in savannah and woodlands in east and southern Africa. In West Africa, however, the species is much scarcer and appears to be most frequent in riparian habitat. It is not uncommon in Senegambia, but is much more sporadic in its distribution in Mali, northern Ghana, Togo, Bénin and central Nigeria<sup>1</sup>.

There are only two records from Ghana, where it has reputedly been overlooked<sup>6</sup> and, similarly, there only two records from Togo, both in riparian habitat<sup>2</sup>. Breeding has not been recorded in either country. It is an uncommon resident in Nigeria, although there are two breeding records<sup>1,3</sup>.

The species has been recorded several times in Bénin. It is recorded as a year-round breeding resident in riparian habitat in Arli and Pendjari National Parks<sup>5</sup>, although the authors provide no data on breeding apart from stating that it had nested there. I recorded a family group of four birds in a dry riverbed in the Forêt Classée of Wari Maro (09°10'N 02°15'E) in central Bénin in June 1996.

The species is reported to use the remains of old nests of several different species<sup>4</sup>. I found a pair nesting under the hollowed-out roots of a tree in the River Ouémé at Bétérou (09°11'N 02°16'E) on 10 February 1998. Two eggs had been laid directly onto the clean river sand, in the cavity under the tree. Unfortunately

these were subsequently destroyed as was one of the birds, and I was unable to follow the nesting through to completion. However the species is probably more common here than was previously thought. From the records available, it appears to prefer riparian habitat in West Africa and this may make the species more difficult to observe, leading it to be overlooked. This breeding record is also of interest because of the general paucity of records for the whole area. ?

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*B. P. 302, Parakou, Bénin.*



## An observation of Ayres' Hawk-Eagle *Hieraaetus dubius* in The Gambia

Detlef Robel

Le 28 août 1994, l'auteur, accompagné de trois autres observateurs, a observé un Aigle d'Ayres *Hieraaetus dubius* au sud de l'aéroport de Yundum, Western Division, Gambie. Une description exhaustive est présentée. L'espèce est surtout résidente: rares sont les observations en dehors des aires de reproduction certaines ou probables. Barlow *et al.*<sup>1</sup> mentionnent trois observations antérieures en Gambie: à Yundum, en mars 1991, et à Kampant, en avril 1991 et mars 1994. L'observation d'un oiseau photographié près de Elephant Island, le 13 janvier 1984, concernait très probablement un Aigle pêcheur *Haliaeetus vocifer* immature et fut rejeté<sup>5</sup>. Le statut de l'Aigle d'Ayres est incertain au Sénégal, où une observation antérieure fut jugée inacceptable par Morel & Morel<sup>6</sup>.

On 28 August 1994, together with Professor M Thoma and the Gambian ornithologist M Lamin Bojang, my wife and I visited an area of open bush savannah with scattered pockets of agriculture (principally peanuts) south of Yundum airport, Banjul, The Gambia. At c11.30 hrs, the call of a Wattled Plover *Vanellus senegallus* drew our attention to a large raptor flying a few metres above the ground with a half-grown lapwing in its talons, pursued by the parent birds. It disappeared into a tree. As we approached, it flew with its prey to another tree with few leaves 30 m further away and perched c6 m above the ground. It then began to feed, and after we had carefully approached to within 25 m we were able to observe it for over 20 mins through 12 x 50 binoculars. Visibility was good, although the sky was overcast.

The raptor was an adult Ayres' Hawk-Eagle *Hieraaetus dubius*, probably a male according to the size and extent of the spots on the underparts and face-pattern<sup>2,3,6</sup>.

### Description

A large raptor, distinctly larger than a female Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* and almost as large as Wahlberg's Eagle *Aquila wahlbergi*. Very powerful appearance in flight, with relatively short broad wings of even width. Wingbeats powerful and rapid. Tail very long and head distinctly extended. Appeared slender at rest, with long legs and a small head. Plumage: mantle dark brown-grey, with pale grey to white feather margins. Uppertail dark grey, barred. Underparts pale grey with conspicuous dark elongated or drop-shaped

spots. Flanks barred, undertail-coverts continuously barred. Thighs pale, with dark transverse barring. Underwing pale grey with dark evenly spaced bars on the primaries and secondaries reminiscent of Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus* or Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*. Undertail grey with uniform dark bars and a narrow pale terminal band. Striking legs and feet, being feathered with the exception of the toes: pale with dark transverse barring. Head relatively narrow. Crown dark brown-grey, with some paler feathers and a pale nape, throat and ear-coverts. Conspicuous long white supercilium gave face-pattern similarity to Northern Goshawk. Bill dark grey to brownish, apparently not large. Irides yellowish red. A small crest was occasionally visible on the occiput, but was always inconspicuous.

### Discussion

Comparatively little information is available on *Hieraaetus dubius*. It breeds in Africa south of the Sahara, but is everywhere sparse and local, in forests and open savannah. It has been recorded from Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, Guinea (proof required), eastern Ivory Coast, Liberia, Ghana, Cameroon (but is always infrequent in West Africa), southern Chad, Central African Republic, northern Zaïre and Uganda, central Ethiopia, southern Somalia, southern Kenya, and—in southern Africa—from northern Angola, southern Zaïre, Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Swaziland<sup>2,4</sup>. Breeding records are, according to Sibley & Monroe<sup>10</sup>, available only from Ghana, Zaïre, Kenya, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Clancey<sup>3</sup> and del Hoyo *et al.*<sup>6</sup>

also list the species in Botswana and Namibia, but this is not confirmed by other authors<sup>7,9</sup>.

Ayres' Hawk-Eagle is primarily resident: records away from breeding or presumed breeding areas are rare. Barlow *et al.*<sup>1</sup> list three previous records in The Gambia: at Yundum (Western Division) in March 1991 and at Kampant in April 1991 and March 1994. An earlier record, of a bird photographed near Elephant Island on 13 January 1984 was rejected, being considered to be most probably an immature African Fish-Eagle *Haliaeetus vocifer*<sup>5</sup>. Its status is uncertain in Senegal<sup>1</sup>, where an earlier record was deemed unacceptable by Morel & Morel<sup>8</sup>. ?

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# Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* in Ethiopia and its status in Africa

Valéry Schollaert

L'observation d'une Bergeronnette citrine *Motacilla citreola* au Lac Ziway, Éthiopie, le 25 février 1997, est rapportée. Ceci constitue la quatrième observation de l'espèce dans le pays. Sur le continent africain, l'espèce a par ailleurs été signalée en Égypte (3 fois), à Djibouti (1 fois) et au Maroc (1 fois).

On 25 February 1997, while watching numerous Yellow Wagtails *Motacilla flava* foraging along the shores of Lake Ziway, Ethiopia, Benoit Forget and I found a first-winter Citrine Wagtail *M. citreola* amongst them. The bird was noticed due to its very grey overall appearance, two rather narrow but distinct white wingbars and relatively longer tail. Closer views allowed us to see the characteristic broad pale supercilium reaching down the sides of the neck and

surrounding the grey ear-coverts. Other features included: entirely grey upperparts with darker grey wing feathers narrowly edged whitish, very dark grey tail with white outer feathers, white throat, and yellow wash on the breast. I had previously seen the species in Israel, the Netherlands and Egypt.

Citrine Wagtail is rarely recorded in Africa. There are ten (or 11?) records from Egypt (the record from April 1985, mentioned by Goodman & Meininger<sup>2</sup>, is



Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* by Mark Andrews

considered the first, but a sighting from the same area, by the same observer, is dated April 1983 in Keith *et al.*<sup>3</sup>); most of these, however, are from Sinai, with only three from the African continent (see Appendix), at Hurghada, in September 1992 and March 1993<sup>4,5</sup> and at Abu Simbel in September 1996 (*Bull. ABC* 4: 50). There is one recent record for Morocco, at Marais du Bas Loukkos, on 3–5 January 1995 (Bergier *et al.*<sup>1</sup>). Keith *et al.*<sup>3</sup> mention only one record for the Afrotropical region, from Djibouti, of a bird moulting into second-summer plumage, at Oued Petite Douba, on 26 February 1990 (*OSME Bull.* 24: 37). Since then, three records from Ethiopia have been published. What was apparently the first Citrine Wagtail for the country was seen and photographed at Dinsho, in Bale Mountains National Park, on 7 January 1994 (*Bull. ABC* 1: 29). Two further records include another one from Bale on 15 March 1994 and an adult female at Boyo, near Hosaina, on 11 November 1994 (*Bull. ABC* 2: 62).

The species may well be overlooked in north-eastern Africa. Among the millions of Yellow Wagtails that migrate through and winter in Ethiopia, a few Citrine Wagtails may indeed easily pass unnoticed. ☞

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### Appendix: Records of Citrine Wagtail *M. citreola* from Egypt collated from *OSME Bulletin* and *Sandgrouse* up to 1997.

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1. Lake Bardawil, north Sinai, on 19 April 1985<sup>2</sup>. Keith *et al.*<sup>3</sup> mention a record, from Zaranik, north Sinai, in early April 1983. Both records are by Hilary Fry and presumably refer to just one individual.
  - 2–3. Na'ama, Sharm el Sheikh, 25–26 November 1991; El Tur, Sinai, 26 November 1991 (A Grieve). *OSME Bull.* 28: 54.
  - 4–5. Female, Hurghada, 21 September 1992 (C Gibbons); Sharm-el-Sheikh, 17–18 October 1992 (S Madge/ Birdquest). *OSME Bull.* 30: 41.
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  7. Male, Sheikh Zweid, north Sinai, 30 March 1995 (D Murdoch). *OSME Bull.* 35: 68.
  - 8–9. Singles at Nuweiba and Sharm el Sheikh sewage farm, 6 May 1996. *Sandgrouse* 18(2): 79.
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- 

## Feeding behaviour of Collared Nightjar *Caprimulgus enarratus*

Malcolm Roxby

Dans la Réserve Spéciale de Périnet, Madagascar de l'Est, un Engoulevent à collier *Caprimulgus enarratus* fut observé en train de chasser, dans la soirée du 22 novembre 1997. Le comportement de cette espèce semble avoir été peu documenté. L'oiseau était perché à environ 20 m de hauteur sur la branche supérieure dénudée d'un arbre mort surplombant une rivière en forêt primaire. De son perchoir, l'oiseau se lançait à la poursuite d'une proie volante non-identifiée et, après l'avoir capturée, retournait à la même branche, un peu à la manière d'un gobemouche. Pendant les 15 minutes environ d'observation, l'oiseau a fait plusieurs sorties semblables, retournant toujours à son perchoir. Les vols furent courts—leur distance n'excédant pas les 10 m—et des vols de chasse prolongés, tels qu'effectués par les autres espèces d'engoulevents, ne furent pas observés.

While spotlighting for owls and lemurs in the Périnet Special Reserve, eastern Madagascar on 22 November 1997, a Collared Nightjar *Caprimulgus enarratus* was observed foraging. As there appears to

be little published information on the behaviour of this species and I can find nothing in the available literature<sup>1</sup> describing its feeding habits, the following may be of interest.

The observation was made at 19.30 hr, when the weather was clear and without perceptible wind. The moon was virtually full. The bird was initially located by the red reflection of its eyes to torchlight. It was perched on the uppermost exposed branch of a dead tree at a height of approximately 20 m, on the edge of the forest in a clearing over a stream between two areas of primary woodland.

It was observed sitting motionless for several seconds before flying out to catch an unidentified airborne prey item and then returning to the same perch, in a manner not dissimilar to a flycatcher. During the c15 minutes the bird was in view, it made

several similar sorties for food always returning to the same resting place. Flights appeared to be over relatively short distances—no more than 10 m—and hawking in the manner of other nightjar species was not observed.

Unfortunately no vocalisation was heard and as far as I am aware the voice of this most enigmatic bird remains undescribed. ♀

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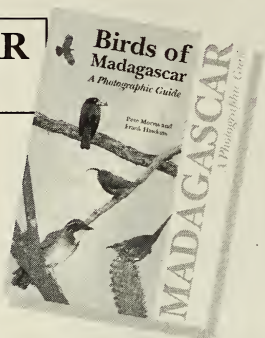
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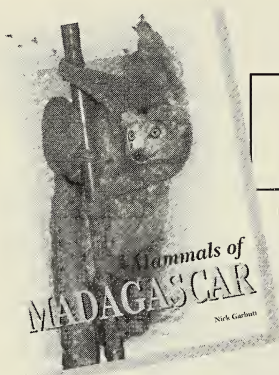
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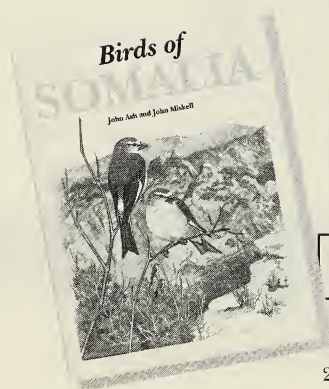
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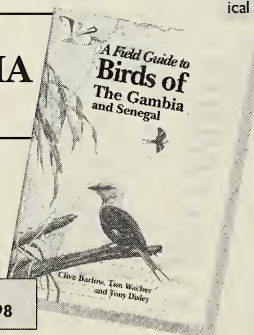
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# Photospot: blue pigeons


Roger Safford

The tropical islands of the south-west Indian Ocean are rich in endemic genera, but most of these are restricted to Madagascar. Many of the birds that have reached the remoter archipelagoes—the Comoros, Seychelles and Mascarenes—are from widespread groups like the white-eyes *Zosterops* and paradise-flycatchers *Terpsiphone*. Only two regional endemic genera are known to have reached every archipelago: the fodies *Foudia* and the blue pigeons *Alectroenas*. By virtue of their distinctiveness and restricted range, these could be considered the most characteristic birds of the region. Whilst the fodies have attracted much conservation and research effort, the blue pigeons have not.

Three species survive today: Seychelles Blue Pigeon *A. pulcherrima* ('very beautiful') on most of the granitic Seychelles, Comoro Blue Pigeon *A. szanzini* on the Comoros (nominate race) and Aldabra (*A. s. minor*), and Madagascar Blue Pigeon *A. madagascariensis* on Madagascar. At least two species are extinct. The Mauritius Blue Pigeon *A. nitidissima* ('very bright') survived well into the 19th century<sup>1</sup>, its extinction probably caused by a combination of hunting, habitat destruction and predation. Unidentified species once occurred on St Pierre and Providence, in the coralline Seychelles<sup>3</sup>, probably Réunion and possibly Rodrigues<sup>1</sup>. Pleasingly, the surviving species are still fairly common over much of their ranges, and none is considered threatened or even near-threatened.

These are very beautiful birds. The blue is, in all cases, a rich and rather unusual hue, and the long, pointed neck feathers are as impressive in silvery white on the Comoro and Seychelles species as in silvery blue on Madagascar. Red caruncles on the face are another characteristic feature. It is tantalising to see the three museum skins of the extinct Mauritius Blue Pigeon, which seemed to combine the best features of the three survivors: a head and neck like the Comoro bird, and a red tail, as on Madagascar.

Blue pigeons are arboreal and sometimes gregarious: flocks of 15 occur on the Comoros (pers. obs) and up to 100 in fruiting *Ficus* trees in the Seychelles (R. Lucking pers. comm.). One reason for the success of the surviving island species seems to be their willingness to take fruits from introduced trees as well as those from native species. On Grande Comore (Ngazidja), they take *Psidium cattleianum* (Strawberry Guava)

and *Solanum auriculatum* fruit (pers. obs), and the Seychelles Blue Pigeon eats *Chrysobalanus icaco* (Coco-plum) (pers. obs.), wild guavas and cinnamon berries<sup>3</sup>. These are among the most abundant weeds on their respective islands, ensuring a plentiful food supply. Only the basics of the breeding ecology are known. Nests are very simple constructions of a few, apparently casually placed, twigs situated in trees. Just one egg is the usual clutch<sup>2,4</sup>. The frail nests are seemingly prone to failure, nesting success being low in the Seychelles (R. Lucking pers. comm.). Swooping advertising flights and a bowing display are typical of these as well as other large pigeons; the bowing display is made particularly impressive as the birds vibrate their lanceolate neck feathers<sup>5</sup>. 

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1. Seychelles Blue Pigeon *Alectroenas pulcherrima*, Seychelles (R. Lucking)
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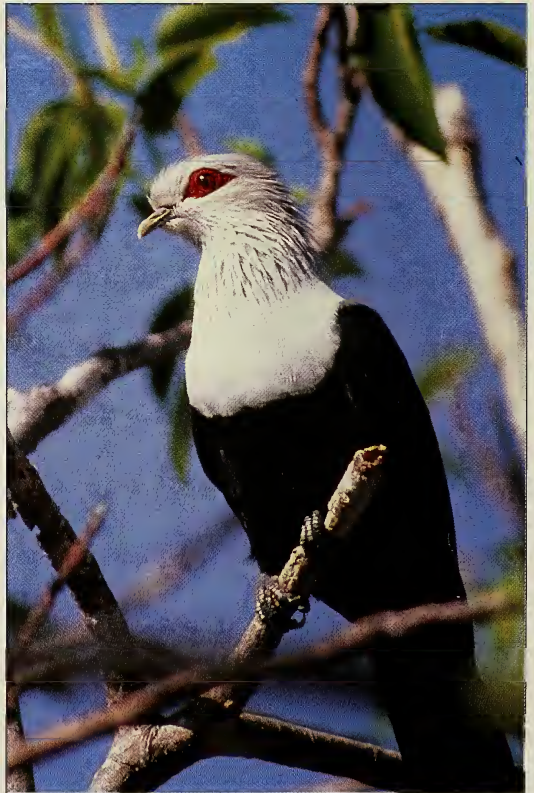


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## Undiscovered country: the non-collection of the Somali shrike

Kit Hustler's remarks (*Bull. ABC* 3: 53–54) on the non-collection of the Somali shrike (named *Laniarius liberatus* in *Ibis* 133: 227–235) require a reply. What I say here is not intended as a commentary on his wider thesis on the importance of specimen evidence, which I very largely accept and support, or on his views of a north–south divide in resources available for collection development, with which I sympathise. However, if there is no correction to his paragraphs relating to the shrike, it may be assumed by *Bulletin* readers and Hustler himself that his information on this subject is valid and his opinion uncontested. They are not.

He begins by outlining what he clearly sees as the arrogant assumption of right by temperate-based scientists who come south bringing not only resources unavailable to in-country counterparts but, worse, “their non-collecting ethics” as well. He asserts that “in some cases, these persons refuse to collect specimens...” and invokes the instance of the shrike, which “reflects this attitude well”. My first difficulty with his argument is that, albeit speaking strictly from an ornithological perspective, I know of no single case where well-resourced scientists have gone to Africa on projects and refused to collect when collecting could be conceived as the central and most obvious method for the fulfilment of their mission. Of course there are many expeditions that seek to extend our knowledge of the conservation status of parts of the African avifauna, but these are often run by young people with no intention, training or need to collect, although they commonly result in the two-way transfer of knowledge and skills to and from African participants, and in the growth in equal measure of in-country biological research and conservation endeavour. BirdLife's forest projects in Kenya, Cameroon and the Upper Guinea region all sprang from such expeditions.

My second difficulty is that even in the one instance that most provokes him he is mistaken. The developed-world scientist who discovered *Laniarius liberatus* was in fact a young biology

graduate working on a British government programme of research into tsetse fly eradication. The person who took care of the bird for a year before releasing it back into the wild, as close as human safety and ecological conditions would allow to its point of capture, was a seasoned scientist working on the control of *Quelea quelea* as part of German government aid to Somalia. The Danish scientists who analysed the DNA from the specimen and made the diagnosis have never, so far as I am aware, set foot in Somalia. Certainly no-one involved in the entire history of this discovery comes within a continent of fitting the general description of some northern scientists given by Hustler in the paragraph that precedes his use of the shrike story to exemplify them.

Hustler's comment that this case “is a good example of the money available to support the non-collecting ethic in the developed world” is therefore entirely without foundation, as is his assertion that the bird was kept in captivity for a year “at vast expense” (as I understand it, the expense was entirely the private contribution of the German scientist, and certainly no accounts have ever been issued to inform any of the rest of us whether these were vast or not). It is, perhaps, easy to assume that the description of *Laniarius liberatus* was the result of some richly funded ornithological survey by a group of asset-stripping northerners, but in reality (as a reading of the paper to some extent reveals) it was the construct of a group of concerned individuals, two of them aid workers, operating at their own or minimal institutional expense (even the DNA work was piggybacked on another, larger programme). It is, moreover, worth noting that one of the four authors of the description is a Somali, who (from what he told me in 1994) fully endorsed and indeed helped lead the actions relating to the release of the shrike, and one is a museum curator known for his championship of specimen evidence<sup>1</sup>.

Moreover, I regret that Hustler appears so unwilling to admit the published conclusion of all the authors that the species represented by the individual they discuss “must be

extremely rare or local, and possibly on the edge of extinction”. He calls the naming of the species on the basis of DNA and feathers alone “entirely irresponsible”, and from wider context it is clear he intends this condemnation to apply to the release of the bird as well. However, there are very rare cases—and I believe the Somali shrike to have been one of them—where the release of a specimen, based on a precautionary view of the conservation status of the taxon it represents, is *scientifically appropriate and entirely responsible*, and my willingness to express and champion this view (to be expanded on elsewhere) in no way diminishes the supreme importance that I and my organisation attach to reference collections of natural history specimens and their need for continued acquisition of material.

Nevertheless, I am mystified how anyone could think that a bird released in Africa, whether from a year in captivity or after ten minutes in a mistnet, must be most likely to end up “in the pot of the nearest locals”. The implication seems to be either that Africans eat the majority of the birds in their environment or that Somalis eat the majority of any individuals released from captivity, or some combination of these two; in any case, I am unaware of the scientific evidence. This aside, the fact that the Somali shrike was set free in a nature reserve “protected efficiently since 1985” and representing “one of the most undisturbed patches of vegetation in the Shabeelle drainage” (*Ibis* 133: 234) certainly deserves kinder recognition.

I am aware that the release of the Somali shrike greatly aggrieved the museum community of ornithologists, who perhaps took it as signalling to the world that museums and collecting are henceforth dispensable. I hope therefore that with the clarifications made here, not all of which are possible to determine from the original account of the shrike, it will be recognised just how unusual this case was. The great majority of conservationists and birdwatchers in turn recognise the irreducible importance of museum collections to their professional and personal interests, and we should strive to ensure that small areas of misunderstanding are not

mythologised into permanently disputed high ground, with both sides striving to occupy it and call it moral.

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## Cassette tapes: uses and abuses

Is the use of cassette tapes bad for birds? The Club would like to know members' views on this question and on whether we should draw up a code of practice and encourage other clubs to follow it as well.

It is an old argument, I know, but one which I was prompted to bring up again at a recent ABC Council meeting, following a visit I made to Madagascar last year with three other members of the African Bird Club. We were struck by the apparently indiscriminate way in which tapes are being used, not just as a means of identifying birds but as the normal means of conjuring them up for visitors.

Madagascar is famous for its high proportion of endemics, many of which are deep forest species notoriously difficult to see without artificial means. There are no commercially available recordings of Malagasy birds, but some visitors bring with them recordings from such sources as the British Library's National Sound Archive. Local guides borrow the tapes and copy them, knowing that they will get bigger tips if they can produce the rarities to order. Madagascar is of course not the only place where this happens, but the problem (if it is a problem) does seem to be particularly acute there because of the rapid expansion in the numbers of visitors and the (entirely admirable) determination of the Malagasy Government to manage ecotourism in a way that ensures maximum benefit to the local community.

There is a vicious circle here. Under increasing pressure from concerned groups both within Madagascar and among international conservationists to halt the destruction of the unique habitats on the island, and the flora and fauna they support, the Malagasy Government has embarked on an ambitious programme of designating protected areas. To finance the

programme, and to provide the income that will ensure the support of local communities, they need to attract tourists. There is much to attract both specialist ornithologists, entomologists, botanists etc., as well as general ecotourists, but visitors will only come in sufficient numbers if they can be reasonably sure of seeing the Madagascar specialities. Without the use of tapes, local guides fear they will not be able to produce the results to keep the ornithological tourists coming. But the danger is that excessive use of tapes might end in the destruction of the very thing that was the attraction in the first place.

This brings us back to the opening question: does the use of tapes actually do any harm? I don't know whether any research has ever been done to prove it, but reason suggests that repeated artificial interruption of a bird's normal behaviour pattern must carry some risk of causing harm. Birds respond to tapes when they are defending territory, and territory is usually defended for one of two reasons: breeding or feeding. If a bird is forced to interrupt its foraging in order to drive a supposed intruder off its patch, its food intake must surely suffer. The damage becomes even greater if it is foraging to feed young. Where territory is being defended for breeding purposes there is perhaps less danger. Indeed, I have even heard it argued (not very convincingly) that playing tapes to birds defending breeding territories is beneficial since only dominant birds respond: the weaker birds are more likely to be driven away.

Another danger is that after too many false alarms birds will fail to respond at all, even to genuine intruders, and their whole social pattern will break down. Or, most likely of all, they will simply move away from the area altogether. Which may be fine (for the birds—but not for tourism) if there are other, remoter areas to which they can withdraw but is not so good if their habitat is already under pressure.

In an ideal world, we birders, unless we have a clear scientific reason for doing so, would intrude as little as possible into the world of the birds we come to observe. We would remain unobtrusively in the background and observe what we could without causing any disturbance. We might use tape recordings to familiarise ourselves with the songs so that we would recognise them when we heard them, but we would never play tapes in the field in order to deceive the birds. Of course

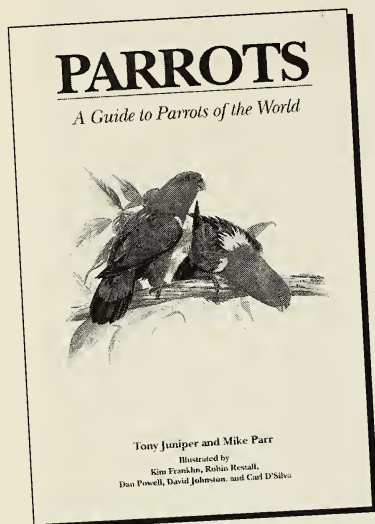
such tactics mean that much more time and patience is needed in order to see the birds—fine in a place to which we can return regularly but not much use in a country which we have spent half our life's savings to reach for just two or three precious weeks. We want to see everything then as quickly as possible and scruples tend to get cast aside.

If, then, some degree of intrusion is inevitable, what should we regard as acceptable and what should we avoid? Arguably, using tapes to call the birds out to where we can see them is less intrusive than charging into the undergrowth to find them. As in most things, the answer probably lies in moderation. The best guides we met in Madagascar did not use tapes at all but relied on their own knowledge of the birds and their habits in order to locate them for their clients. Such guides had learnt to imitate the songs of their local specialities and could call them out without needing to use tapes. There is perhaps no logical difference between using tapes and using voiced imitations, except that the craft involved in the latter, usually based on a deep understanding and respect for the species involved, creates its own legitimacy. More concretely, the fact that there are relatively few guides with the skills and experience to work without tapes restricts the potential damage to a level where it is unlikely to be significant.

Tape recordings have an important role to play as an aid to identification, and there are clearly occasions (for example in making population censuses) when their use in the field is scientifically justified—but is it right to use them just so that the birds can be ticked off on somebody's life list? I would welcome the views of members on this. Should the Club try to develop a code of conduct governing the use of tapes? The American Birding Association's 'Code of Birding Ethics' includes the following paragraph: "Limit the use of recordings and other methods of attracting birds, and never use such methods in heavily birded areas or for attracting any species that is Threatened, Endangered or of Special Concern, or is rare in your area."

Should the African Bird Club endorse a similar policy, or does this go too far or not far enough? Your Council would like to know what you think and also if you know of any research which has been done into this subject.

Bill Quantrill, *Secretary, African Bird Club*, c/o BirdLife International,  
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## Parrots. A Guide to the Parrots of the World

Tony Juniper and Mike Parr. Illustrated by Kim Franklin, Robin Restall, Dan Powell, David Johnston and Carl D'Silva. 1998. 584 pp, 88 colour plates and many distribution maps. Pica Press, The Banks, Mountfield, Nr. Robertsbridge, East Sussex TN32 5JY. UK£35.00.

Joseph Forshaw's *Parrots of the World* has, for the past 25 years, been the standard work on this fascinating group of birds. That is up until now. This new publication from Pica Press, as well as being a substantially less weighty tome, is a comprehensive identification handbook for use by birders, fieldworkers, customs officer and others involved in parrot identification in the wild, captivity or trade.

The first 37 pages introduce the layout of the book and briefly review the taxonomy and natural history of the group, their conservation status and threats. This last section makes for rather sobering reading given that the parrot family possesses the largest number of threatened species of any bird family, with 20% of all parrot

species under threat due to habitat loss and trapping of birds for the wild bird trade.

There follows 88 colour plates illustrating the 352 species recognised in the book and any distinct races. The quality of the plates is excellent and Dan Powell's distinctive style stands out pleasingly from the other four illustrators. Brief captions are given on the opposite page to the plates but the most detailed information is given in the more lengthy species accounts section.

The species accounts occupy over 330 pages of the book and covers thoroughly the identification, distribution and status, ecology, description, sex/age, measurements and geographical variation of each species. There is also a distribution map for each species.

Inevitably with a work of this magnitude, a few errors have slipped through. For example, the authors state that Grey-headed Lovebird *Agapornis canus* is still present in Seychelles whereas the last reliable record of the species in the Seychelles was in 1977. Furthermore, the idea that the Seychelles Black Parrot *Coracopsis nigra barklyi* is an introduction from the Comores has long since been dismissed as idle speculation.

These minor comments aside, this book is an impressive achievement and a must for all those interested in parrots, their identification and conservation.

Rob Lucking

## Birding in Southern KwaZulu-Natal

David Allan. 1998. *Hibiscus Coast and Country Publicity Association/Durban Natural Science Museum*. 52 pp, 30 colour photographs and 11 maps. R15. (Obtainable from Bird Dept, Durban Natural Science Museum, PO Box 4085, Durban 4000; tel: 031 3006220/6211; fax: 031 3006302; email: [davida@durban.gov.za](mailto:davida@durban.gov.za))

This truly pocketable, easy-to-use, full-colour booklet is an excellent introductory guide to nine premier

birding spots in southern KwaZulu-Natal. These include seven Nature Reserves—the Vernon Crookes, Empisini. T.C. Robertson, Oriibi Gorge, Uvongo River, Mpenjati Public Resort and Umtamvuna—as well as the Umdoni Park and Weza-Ngele Forest. For each of these sites the author has provided a clearly written text describing how to get there, where/when to birdwatch, the availability of accommodation and other useful visitor facilities, in addition to a detailed breakdown of the habitats and their birds. Each text is accompanied by at least one map and my only small gripe is that a second more detailed trail map for the Vernon Crookes Nature Reserve is difficult to relate to the larger-scale map of the whole site.

The guide also includes a tabulated checklist of all 386 bird species recorded at the nine sites. This gives information on a bird's habitat preferences, its seasonality and status as well as the bird's Zulu name. It also highlights species that are either provincial or regional endemics, including some of the really exciting South African species like Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres*, Blue Crane *Anthropoides paradiseas*, Knysna Woodpecker *Campethera notata*, Blue Swallow *Hirundo atrocaerulea*, Bush Blackcap *Lioptilus nigricapillus*, Green Twinspot *Mandingoa nitidula* and Grey Waxbill *Estrilda perreini*.

A further interesting and valuable section of this highly recommended booklet is a short introduction to the historical, cultural and economic importance of birds to the Zulu people. David Allan reminds all of us who are imbued with the dominant Eurocentric attitudes to birds and the environment that there are other rich cultural responses to the natural world. If conservation is to find broad support in a region like KwaZulu-Natal then it needs to embrace and value the traditions of the majority population, the Zulu people themselves.

Mark Cocker

## African Birds in Field and Aviary. A guide to a mixed collection

*The Avicultural Research Unit. 1997. 262 pp, 8 colour photographic plates, many line drawings and 279 distribution maps. Avicultural Research Unit, 100 Innes Road, Durban, 4025 Natal, South Africa. R114.40.*

Whilst the short preface to this book announces that it has been produced to 'provide a practical guide to the wonderful hobby of birdkeeping', in practice it also provides a useful resource for field ornithologists seeking data on African birds. The text was formerly published in two separate volumes (in 1989 and 1996) but has been revised and updated for this new and more comprehensive edition. The species accounts cover 279 species within the following family groupings: Phasianidae, Turnicidae, Pteroclididae, Columbidae, Psittacidae, Ploceidae, Estrildidae, Fringillidae and Emberizidae. As a significant number of the species included here have not yet been covered by the relevant volume of *The Birds of Africa*, it should be automatically apparent that this volume will provide a useful compendium of published and unpublished information, as data have been extracted from both existing sources and nest record cards. For each species, the following data are supplied: 'Description' including subspecies information, 'Voice', 'Habitat', 'Distribution' which again includes information to subspecies level, 'Feeding', 'Breeding', and 'Aviculture'. Alternative English names and overall body length data are also incorporated. Particularly valuable is that data from the avicultural records are sourced to the number of available datasets for each fact. The book is

completed by a series of sections designed to guide the uninitiated through the process of starting and running a successful aviary; distribution maps for all species covered in the text; references; and an index. Despite its image as being a work for non-field ornithologists and cagebird keepers, this book is, in fact, also a valuable research tool for those solely interested in wild birds.

Guy M. Kirwan

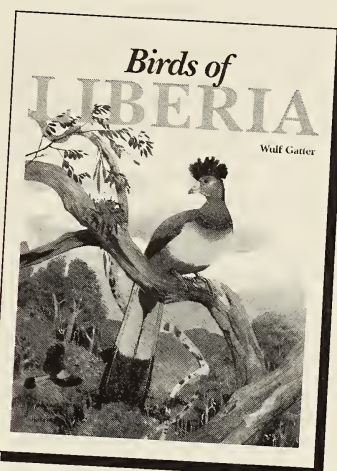
## Birds of Liberia

*Wulf Gatter. 1998. 320 pp, 4 colour plates, 107 photographs, maps, figures. Pica Press, The Banks, Mountfield, Nr. Robertsbridge, East Sussex TN32 5JY. UK£40.00.*

With a total area of 96,258 km<sup>2</sup> (about three times the size of Belgium), Liberia is a relatively small country. It is, however, the only West African country which was originally almost entirely covered by forest and now contains more than half of the remaining closed canopy forest in the Upper Guinea Forest Block. It therefore constitutes the most important reservoir for forest species typical of this area.

Despite recent fieldwork, mostly carried out in the 1960s and 1970s and concentrated around Mount Nimba, ornithological knowledge of the country has remained scanty and scattered. In assembling and synthesizing all that is known about the country's avifauna, *Birds of Liberia* thus constitutes the first modern and readily available reference work. It is the result of some 15 years of fieldwork by the author, mainly conducted between 1981–1995, augmented by previously published data, and is clearly the work of someone who knows the country and its birds intimately.

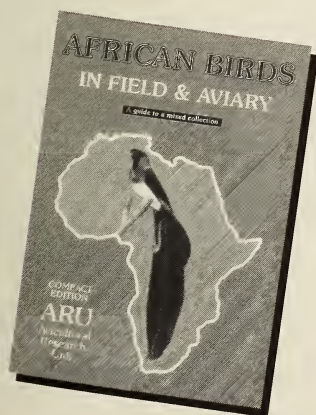
The first part (76 pp) includes chapters on the political history and the history of ornithology in Liberia, geology and topography, climate, vegetation zones, habitats of importance to birds, biological seasons in forest and savannah, moult, migration, ecology of forest birds, aspects of biogeography, and conservation in Liberia. The second and major part (157 pp) contains a complete annotated list of the birds of the country, followed by a lavish photographic section (39 pp) with 86 colour and 22



black-and-white photographs. The final part contains six appendices, a detailed gazetteer, a bibliography listing 238 titles, and an index including English and scientific bird names.

The introductory section is quite extensive and competently treats the different subjects. The maps of administrative counties, major towns, topography and main rivers are clear and adequate, but unfortunately on the printed page they are reduced to such a degree that one needs a magnifying glass to read the names of localities and topographical features on them. The inclusion of a map showing National Forest Reserves and Parks, which are often referred to in the species accounts, would have been useful. An unusual chapter in a book of this kind is that on the ecology of forest birds, which discusses niche occupation and behaviour of birds in rainforest trees. It actually constitutes a substantial paper, illustrating foraging height and vertical species distribution with numerous graphs and a table of 109 species occurring in mixed bird parties. The latter, included as Appendix 2, also gives the height ranges over which each species was encountered, with a figure apparently indicating (although this is not mentioned) the number of bird parties in which they were found. Without the indication of the total number of bird parties, however, these figures are of less value than they otherwise might have been.

The systematic list contains 611 species, a total which, curiously, is nowhere mentioned and is 30 more



than the last published list, by Dowsett<sup>5</sup>, which was almost wholly based on Gatter's preliminary checklist of 1988. The total of 611 includes, however, possible escapes, such as Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* and Long-tailed Glossy Starling *Lamprotornis caudatus* as well as Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*. For each species, information is given on abundance, status, habitat and distribution within the country and, for most, interesting notes are included on their habits, ecology, and annual cycle. The author regularly stresses where his findings differ from those of other workers. An extremely useful feature are the distribution maps with quarter-degree grid squares of 27.5 x 27.5 km, which are provided for 381 species. An appendix lists 21 additional species which might occur in Liberia, with reasons given. To describe abundance, five categories have been used: abundant, common, not uncommon (erroneously printed as "not common"), uncommon, and rare. While one can only agree with the author that such categories are difficult to define, one would have expected to find at least an attempt at one, as occurs in some other country checklists and in *Birds of Africa*. Now that the available information is so clearly presented, some intriguing questions arise. Is Shelley's Eagle Owl *Bubo shelleyi* really more widespread than Red-chested Owlet *Glaucidium tephronotum*? Why are typical forest species such as Black-headed Apalis *Apalis nigriceps* and Yellow-fronted Penduline Tit *Anthoscopus flavifrons* so restricted in distribution? And why are there so few records of Winding Cisticola *Cisticola galactotes*? Do the data reflect their actual distributions or have these species been under-recorded? Future fieldwork should provide the answers.

Inevitably, a few published data have been overlooked, but these merely result in minor inaccuracies that do not affect the general quality of the work. With reference to *Birds of Africa* it is, for example, stated that the voice of Grey-throated Rail *Canirallus oculeus* is unknown; this may have been so in 1986, when the second volume of the latter work was published, but since then the rail's vocalizations have been described by Brosset & Erard<sup>3</sup> and Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett<sup>6</sup>. Outside Liberia, the vagrant Greater Sand Plover

*Charadrius leschenaultii* has not only been recorded from Senegal, Nigeria and Gabon, but also from neighbouring Ivory Coast<sup>4</sup>, a country where Pale-fronted Negrofinch *Nigrita luteifrons*, rare and local in Upper Guinea, has also been found, in addition to Ghana and Sierra Leone<sup>7</sup>.

The extensive photographic section mainly contains photos of habitats (29 colour and seven black-and-white) and birds (56 colour and seven black-and-white), plus a few others. Amongst the latter, the author has commendably included historic portraits of J Büttikofer, the most important early explorer of Liberia's avifauna, and of F X Stampfli, who made a significant collection of birds in the 1880s. The habitat photos are of good quality and cover the country's different habitats, thus forming an essential part of the book. The quality of the bird photos is rather variable, although generally acceptable, and the selection is somewhat haphazard, apparently more reflecting availability than usefulness. I found the most interesting those of Sierra Leone Prinia *Schistolaia leontica* and Black-headed Rufous Warbler *Bathmocercus cerviniventris*—the first photos of these species I have seen. I was particularly thrilled to see that a photograph had been included of the enigmatic Baumann's Greenbul *Phyllastrephus baumannii*, a species of which there are few claims, many of them moreover based on misidentifications. Unfortunately, this seems also to be true here: to my eye the bird in the photo looks suspiciously like a White-throated Greenbul *P. albigularis*. I found the inclusion of eight pages of black-and-white photos at the end of 29 pages of colour a bit of an anticlimax: surely the most interesting ones (eg those of habitats) could have been included in the colour section, if necessary replacing some of the less inspiring bird photos, while others could easily have been omitted.

Appendix 3 gives estimates of population sizes for 87 species, such as White-breasted Guineafowl *Agelastes meleagrides* (10,000 pairs), Rufous Fishing Owl *Scotopelia ussleri* (800 pairs), Western Wattled Cuckoo-shrike *Lobotos lobatus* (20,000 pairs), Baumann's Greenbul (a remarkable 15,000 pairs), Yellow-headed Picathartes *Picathartes gymnocephalus* (1,000 pairs) and Gola Malimbe

*Malimbus ballmanni* (10,000 pairs). At the other end of the spectrum, Little Greenbul *Andropadus virens* and Grey-backed Camaroptera *Camaroptera brachyura* are estimated to be most numerous with 4 million pairs, curiously followed by Grey-headed Negrofinch *Nigrita canicapilla* with 3 million. One would be interested to know why these 87 particular species were selected and, especially, how these estimates were made.

I noticed some editorial slips, such as errors in foreign words and names, and a few references, mentioned in the text, are missing from the bibliography.

Finally, a word on the four colour plates by Martin Woodcock, inserted between the first and second part. Although of high quality, one is left wondering why these have been included at all and on what basis the 29 species illustrated were selected as they range from the rare Spot-breasted Ibis *Bostrychia rara* to the abundant Olive Sunbird *Nectarinia olivacea*; indeed, explanatory captions are lacking and nowhere in the text is reference is made to these illustrations. They thus appear out of place and redundant, and could have been usefully replaced by, for example, full-page colour maps of vegetation and topography, as with those in the recently published *Birds of Somalia*<sup>1</sup> from the same publisher. Regarding maps, it would also have been a great help if a map with county and place names had been printed on the inside of the cover (as in another Pica Press publication, *Birds of The Gambia*<sup>2</sup>): this would have avoided much laborious turning of pages to locate the tiny maps on pp. 11–12.

Stressing that criticisms such as these do not detract from the high quality of the work is something of a cliché but in this case is nonetheless true for that. This attractively produced book is indeed an impressive piece of work containing a wealth of information, much of it fascinating. It constitutes an essential reference to the birds of the region for which the author and publisher are to be congratulated.

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Ron Demey

### Checklist of the birds of Nairobi including Nairobi National Park

Bill Harvey. 1997. *The British Council, Nairobi*. 32 pp. B5 format. No price details.

Birders visiting Africa will know about the wealth of birdlife that Kenya supports (at least 1,080 species), but may be less familiar with the proximity of much of this birdlife to the capital itself. An impressive total of 604 species has been recorded (to press) within the city boundaries, which includes parts of two important ecosystems—the grasslands that stretch from northern Tanzania to the Laikipia plateau north of Mount Kenya and the forested foothills of the Aberdare range. Despite increasing urbanisation, birding hotspots within easy reach of the city include the

Arboretum, the UN complex at Gigiri, and wooded suburban gardens in the Karen-Langata area, in addition to various small wetlands and not forgetting Nairobi National Park, which lies less than 5 km from the city centre (making it relatively accessible for the stopover birder).

Bill Harvey has meticulously collated bird records from 1972. The checklist offers codings for preferred habitat types (seven types), frequency of observation (very frequent, frequent, occasional, rare) and status code (resident, Palearctic migrant or intra-African migrant). It also gives the likelihood of encounter with each species at both the Arboretum and within the National Park. Species nomenclature follows the third edition of the Check-list of the Birds of Kenya. Eight columns are provided to allow dates of sightings, numbers etc to be entered. Four hundred and ninety-three species are treated in the main list, with exceptional records (111 species)—those species not reliably reported since 1972 (36), or seen less than six times since this date, or pending formal acceptance (four) are placed in an appendix (with date and location of occurrence).

The date of the start of this list (1972) coincided with the start of Fleur Ng'weno's bird walks and this checklist is dedicated to her. Fleur has been voluntarily taking tourists and interested local birders out in search of birds around the city for the past 25 years, much to the benefit of Museum staff, local tourist guides and visiting birders, all of whom have benefited greatly from her teachings.

Walks leave from outside the Museum at 08.30 every Wednesday

morning and well worth making the effort to catch up with, if only to share Fleur's knowledge and enthusiasm for African birds and their conservation.

This booklet aims to further enthuse local interest in the city's birdlife and is well worth obtaining for any birder visiting or passing through Kenya.


Tony Stones

### Endangered Wildlife: Ecotourism and the Environment, a vision

*Endangered Wildlife Trust*, 1997. 154 pp. ISBN 0 620 21619 0. UK £19.00

*Endangered Wildlife: Ecotourism and the Environment, a Vision* is the fifth annual report of the Endangered Wildlife Trust. Vision 5 covers an impressive range of subjects from ecotourism to traditional medicine and business, and the environment to endangered species conservation.

Of interest to ABC members is James Harrison's article on the recently published Southern African Bird Atlas and its implications for conservation and Kevin McCann's review of how Africa's largest electricity supplier is working with the Endangered Wildlife Trust to minimise the impacts of powerlines upon populations of Blue *Anthropoides paradisea*, Southern Crowned *Balearica regulorum* and Wattled Cranes *Bugeramus carunculatus*.

Vision 5 is a fascinating read and has been described as a state of the environment report for southern Africa. Anybody with an active interest in conservation in southern Africa should definitely buy a copy. 

Rob Lucking

# Recent Reports



These are largely unconfirmed records published for interest only; all dates refer to 1998 unless otherwise stated. We thank all birders who have sent in their records and urge them to submit full details to the relevant national or regional organisations. It is suggested that observations of each species be compared with relevant literature to set new data in context and that observers who are unfamiliar with the status of birds in a particular country refer to R.J. Dowsett and A.D. Forbes-Watson *Checklist of Birds of the Afrotropical and Malagasy Regions* or more recent or appropriate sources before submitting records.

## Cameroon

Fieldwork conducted from November 1997–April 1998, produced the following interesting records. A **Spotted Crake** *Porzana porzana*, seen in a marsh by the Sanaga River between Yaounde and Bafia on 22 November 1997 (RD, JDM) and a **Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea* on the Boumba River on 28 November 1997 (FDL) are both additions to the Cameroon list. Three **White-naped Pigeon** *Columba albinucha* were found on Mt. Kupe at 1,000 m in March and three more in the Bakossi Mts at 1,350 m on 31 March. **Barred Owlet** *Glaucidium capense* was found in the Nki and Boumba-Bek reserves in the south-east of the country. Interestingly, **Sjöstedt's Barred Owlet** *G. sjöstedti* also appeared at Nki and was found calling next to Barred. In addition to the locally common **Brown Nightjar** *Caprimulgus binotatus* and **Bates's Nightjar** *C. batesi*, mystery nightjars *Caprimulgus* sp. (*prigoginei*?) were found calling in Nki and the buffer zone in late December and early January. Four **Black-eared Ground-Thrush** *Zoothera camaronensis* were mist-netted in Western Bakossi at 400 m in April. At least six **Scrub-River Warbler** *Bradypterus grandis* were holding territories in a small enclosed swamp in Lobéké Game Reserve and another one in a tiny swamp at Nki, in December–January; given the number of suitable swamps

in Lobéké, the population of this little-known species in this area could be important. **Uganda Woodland Warblers** *Phylloscopus budongoensis* were common everywhere in the south-east, above 400 m; it is expected to occur throughout southern Cameroon. **Black-throated Apalis** *Apalis jacksoni* was found commonly above 500 m in Boumba-Bek Forest. The rarely observed **Tessmann's Flycatcher** *Muscicapa tessmanni* was mist-netted on the edge of the Boumba River and observed at Nki. **White-throated Mountain Babbler** *Kupeornis gilberti* was abundant above 1,100 m in the Bakossi Mts., which must hold the most important population of the species. An old nest of **Grey-necked Picathartes** *Picathartes oreas* found on a rock along the Boumba River constitutes a considerable eastward range extension. The species was also found in the Bakossi Mts. Also there, a **Mount Kupe Bush-shrike** *Malaconotus kupeensis* was tape-recorded on 9 April at 1,150–1,200 m; this is the first observation of the species away from Mt. Kupe. **Green-breasted Bush-shrike** *Malaconotus gladiator* proved common in the Bakossi's, occurring at least as low as 1,100 m; one was also heard near the lake on Mt. Oku at 2,250 m, where the species must be on the verge of extinction. A record of **Bannerman's Weaver** *Ploceus bannermanni* from Kodmin in the Bakossi Mts. represents a small range extension to the south-west. More records of **Locust Finch** *Oryzospiza locustella* were obtained from the south-east, where four birds were seen in enclosed grassland in Boumba-Bek, on 9 December (all RJD & FDL). Three **Emin's Shrike** *Lanius gubernator* were seen at Benoue National Park on 16–17 December 1997; this species is rarely recorded in Cameroon (JV).

Observations made during a visit in March–April include the following. A flock of at least 100 **European Hobby** *Falco subbuteo* flying north on 4 April at Ngaoundaba was a quite remarkable sighting. A **Com-**

**mon Quail** *Coturnix coturnix* was seen at Waza on 30 March; this species does not figure on the published country checklists, but there appear to have been other recent records in Waza. Still at Waza, impressive flocks totalling at least 1,000 **Northern Crowned Crane** *Balearica pavonina* were seen on 29–30 March and a pair of **Bronze-winged Courser** *Rhinoptilus chalcopertus* was discovered on a nest containing two eggs on 30 March; the standard annotated checklist for the country (Louette 1981) only mentions this species as a transition migrant. Six **Sudan Golden Sparrow** *Passer luteus*, including some rather washed-out males, were found at Mozogo-Gokoro. A juvenile **Maxwell's Black Weaver** *Ploceus albinucha* in a mixed-species flock on Mt. Kupe on 9 March appears to be the first record for the mountain (all NB).

## Canary Islands

Two **Red-billed Tropicbird** *Phaethon aethereus* were seen flying round the harbour at Puerto del Rosaria, Fuerteventura on 20 April. A **Wilson's Storm Petrel** *Oceanites oceanicus* was seen from the ferry between El Hierro and La Gomera on 21 May. Between Tenerife and La Gomera and La Gomera and El Hierro single **White-faced Storm Petrels** *Pelagodroma marina* were recorded on 4 January, and three between Gran Canaria and Tenerife on 13 March. A **Madeiran Storm Petrel** *Oceanodroma castro* was seen between La Gomera and Las Palmas on 23 March. A **Western Reef Heron** *Egretta gularis* was at Puerta del Carmen, Lanzarote on 17 January, and another at Embalse de Molina, Tenerife on 8–10 April (second record for Tenerife if accepted). A **Sacred Ibis** *Threskiornis aethiopicus* of unknown origin flew past Candelaria, Tenerife on 1 May. Breeding of **Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea* on Fuerteventura was confirmed when a pair, found at Embalse de Valle Molina, on 12 March, was seen with a chick on 16

April. Also on Fuerteventura, a female **American Wigeon** *Anas americana* stayed at Embalse de los Molinos from 7 November 1997 until at least 10 January. Single drake **Green-winged Teals** *A. (crecca) carolinensis* were seen at Embalse de la Cruz Santa, Tenerife on 29 December 1997, at Embalse de los Molinos, Fuerteventura on 28–30 December 1997, and near Valle Guerra, Tenerife on 12 February; the last may have been present for a month. A **Short-toed Eagle** *Circus gallicus* seen between Tuineje and Pajara on 4 March, and a **Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus* near La Oliva on 8 March, would both constitute firsts for Fuerteventura; the former would be the third Canary Islands record, the latter the fifth. A **Spotted Crake** *Porzana porzana* was at Tejina Ponds, Tenerife on 8 April. Single **Avocets** *Recurvirostra avosetta* were seen at Roquito del Fraile, Tenerife from 10 March until at least 11 April, and at La Maretta on 2 April. A **Lesser Sand Plover** *Charadrius mongolus* at Corralejo, Fuerteventura on 26 April would be a first for the islands if accepted. A **Temminck's Stint** *Calidris temminckii* was at Embalse de Valle Molina, Fuerteventura on 12 March. On Tenerife, the long-staying **Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularia* was present at Roquito del Fraile until at least 25 February; what was presumed to be the same bird was seen at Las Galletas on 22 March. A first-winter **Mediterranean Gull** *Larus melanocephalus* at Las Galletas, Tenerife, stayed from 11–14 March at least. A **Franklin's Gull** *L. pipixcan* was reported near Costa Tegui, Lanzarote on 14 January. An adult summer **Sabine's Gull** *L. sabini* was seen between Gran Canaria and Tenerife on 29 April. A first-winter **Ring-billed Gull** *L. delawarensis* was at La Caleta, Tenerife on 31 December 1997. The third **Glaucous Gull** *L. hyperboreus* for the archipelago, a second-winter bird, was observed in the port of Las Palmas, Gran Canaria on 13 March. Noteworthy terns include a **Gull-billed Tern** *Sterna nilotica* at El Médano, Tenerife on 24 April, a **Sooty Tern** *S. fuscata* at Caleta de Fustes, Fuerteventura on 9 February, and two **Little Terns** *S. albigrons* at Puerto del Rosario, Fuerteventura on 5 May. The second **Bar-tailed Desert Lark** *Ammomanes cincturus* for the Canary Islands was on La Gomera on 27 February, while



Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*  
by Mark Andrews

the third and fourth **Hoopoe Lark** *Alaemon alaudipes* were seen on Fuerteventura, the first near Caleta de Fustes on 1–4 March, and the second near La Oliva on 9 March. A **Tree Pipit** *Anthus trivialis* carrying food or nesting material at Morro Jable, Fuerteventura on 15 May, could indicate the first breeding record of this species within the Canaries. The first **Alpine Accentor** *Prunella collaris* for the islands was at Roquito del Fraile, Tenerife on 1 April. A male **Black-eared Wheatear** *Oenanthe hispanica* was seen near Finca del Vicario, Fuerteventura on 8 March. **Subalpine Warblers** *Sylvia cantillans* at Ten Bell and Amarilla Golf on 28 February were the first for two years on Tenerife. A **Penduline Tit** *Remiz pendulinus* (the first record for the islands if accepted) was at Tejina Ponds on 8 April. The **Blue-eared Glossy Starling** *Lamprolornis chalybaeus* that was still at San Andrés, Tenerife on 11 March was obviously most likely an escape but may have been ship-assisted. The first record for the Canary Islands of **House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus* was of a pair carrying nesting material into a palm tree at Plaza Mr Joly, Las Palmas, Gran Canaria on 13 March; a colony of about 20 pairs was discovered two days later, some of the males being obvious hybrid **House x Spanish Sparrows** *P. hispaniolensis*. A **Sudan Golden Sparrow** *P. luteus* at las Tejitas, Tenerife on 7–10 March may have been a genuine vagrant due to easterly winds which brought an influx of migrants at that time. Two **Siskins** *Carduelis spinus* were seen at Los Rodeos, Tenerife on 23 April (all TC; MB, SB, EG, RM, RO, CT, DTO, SY per TC).

### Congo-Brazzaville

The first **Yellow White-eyes** *Zosterops senegalensis* for the country were

found in several places along the Dja and Ngoko Rivers from Ndongo to Moloundou in December 1997–January 1998 (RD & FDL).

### Egypt

A juvenile **African Fish Eagle** *Haliaeetus vocifer*, claimed from Garf Hussein on Lake Nasser on 15 October 1997 (DW) and a **Three-banded Plover** *Charadrius tricollaris* at Aswan on 14 December 1997 (CW) constitute the first and second records respectively for Egypt and the Western Palearctic (the first Three-banded Plover occurred in March 1993). Three **Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra* just south of Aswan on 11 December was a rare winter record, with only two recent records (1952 and 1979) mentioned by Goodman & Meininger (1989) (CW).

### Equatorial Guinea

A three-week visit in January–February added more than 40 species to the country's list and clarified the status of many others. Highlights included the discovery of several montane species on Monte Alen (peak 1,350 m), such as **Grey Cuckoo-shrike** *Coracina caesia*, **Black-capped Woodland Warbler** *Phylloscopus herberti* and **Pink-footed Puffback** *Dryoscopus angolensis*. **Uganda Woodland Warbler** *Phylloscopus budongoensis* was also found to be common, from 325–1,100 m, and overlapped with *P. herberti* above 800 m. **Black-throated Apalis** *Apalis jacksoni* was found on the eastern slopes of the mountain at 750 m. **Zenker's Honeyguide** *Melignomon zenkeri* appeared common, with three sightings at 350–950 m. Both **Verreaux's Batis** *Batis minima* and **Bioko Batis** *B. poensis* occur (RD & FDL).

### Ethiopia

Three **Water Thick-knee** *Burhinus vermiculatus* were seen on the Genale River east of Bogol Manyo on 28 February; this species does not appear to have been officially recorded in the country before. At least 12 **Degodi Lark** *Mirafra degodiensis* were found around the type-locality east of Bogol Manyo on 28 February–1 March. Their song, which was tape-recorded, was described as a repeated sibilant trill similar to that of **Pink-breasted Lark** *M. poecilosterna* occasionally mixed with notes resembling those of **Gillet's Lark** *M. gillettii*; some birds even uttered a persistent song very reminiscent of Gillett's. Some ten **Sidamo Lark** *Heteromirafra*

*sidamoensis* were observed and tape-recorded on the Liben plains on 27 February. The song, given in moderately high display flight, consisted of five single wheezy notes uttered during take-off, followed by a typical lark-like warble and interspersed with squeaky notes at the end; the birds would then gradually and silently drop to the ground with dangling legs. Three **Marsh Warbler** *Acrocephalus palustris* were seen together at Langanu on 21 February; this species appears to be rarely recorded in Ethiopia. Good views of a **Yellow-throated Serin** *Serinus flavigula* were obtained at the known site of Melka Jebdu on 19 February (*all NB*).

### The Gambia

A **Brown Booby** *Sula leucogaster* was seen fishing off Banjul on 31 December 1997 (*EE*). The first **Senegal Plover** *Vanellus lugubris* for the country was observed and photographed on 8 December 1997 at the Tanji Reserve (*BM, LJ*).

### Ghana

January records from Kakum National Park include the following. A **Chocolate-backed Kingfisher** *Halcyon badia* was feeding a young on 20th; there are relatively few breeding records of this species. Two **Yellow-bearded Greenbul** *Crimiger olivaceus* were seen under the walkway, also on 20th; this species was only rediscovered in the country in the 1980s. A single **Blue-headed Crested Flycatcher** *Trochocercus nitens*, a rarely seen bird in Ghana, was spotted on 21st (*all VS*).

### Ivory Coast

A trip made from December 1997–January 1998 produced the following interesting records. A **Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra* flying with **Woolly-necked Storks** *C. episcopus* over northern Comoé National Park on 29 December constitutes the second published record for Ivory Coast; the species was first reported in 1989, when some birds were spotted along the Comoé River from a helicopter on 8 February (Walsh 1991, *Bull. Brit. Ornithol. Cl.* 111: 209–215). A **Marabou Stork** *Leptoptilos crumeniferus* was also there on 28 December; formerly listed as a migrant to the country, a pair of this species was found to breed in Comoé in March–April 1997 (Salewski & Korb 1998, *Malimbus* 20: 54–55). A **Common Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus*

*collybita* seen at Taabo Dam on 24 December 1997 constitutes the second record, well south of the first sighting, in Comoé National Park in 1995 (Williams 1997, *Malimbus* 19: 33–34). A coastal record of a female **Montagu's Harrier** *Circus pygargus* near Assinie-Mafia on 10 January is unusually far south. A **Lowland Akalat** *Sheppardia cyornithopsis* was attending an ant swarm at Yapo on 24 December 1997; there are few records of this species in the eastern part of the country. Two **Pale-fronted Negrofinch** *Nigrita luteifrons* were observed near Guiroutou on 8 January; this species was only recently discovered in Ivory Coast and Tai is the only known locality. A male **Brown-rumped Bunting** *Emberiza affinis* was seen in the north of Comoé National Park on 29 December 1997 (*all NB*).

### Kenya

The following records have recently been accepted. A **Dwarf Bittern** *Ixobrychus sturmii* north of Malindi on 30 December 1997, was, at this time of the year, probably a resident bird. An adult **Honey Buzzard** *Pernis apivorus*, an uncommon migrant, was soaring over Chawia forest patch, Taita Hills on 3 February 1998. The first **Grasshopper Buzzard** *Butastur rufipennis* for western Kenya was seen at Busia in October 1997. Two **Red-necked Falcon** *Falco chicquera* were between Malindi and Watamu on 1 February 1998. A **Sooty Falcon** *F. concolor* was found injured in Watamu, Malindi in the second week of April and recuperated before release; spring records for this species in Kenya are few and far between. A **Streaky-breasted Flufftail** *Sarothrura boehmi* was recorded in the wetlands around Thika in May 1997. An adult **Bronze-winged Courser** *Rhinoptilus chalcopertus* with young in Voi in January 1998 was the first record for many years. A **Chestnut-banded Plover** *Charadrius pallidus* stayed at Elementaita through much of January; this is a rare species

away from Lake Magadi. **Great Snipe** *Gallinago media* were reported from Busia and the Rift Valley in October 1997. A **Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus* was at Lake Nakuru on 18 January. A pair of **Brown-breasted Barbet** *Lybius melanopterus* was observed feeding on fruit at Yale, Taita Hills on 4 February 1998; this is a local species in Kenya less frequently reported away from the coast. The rare and relatively little-known **Pallid (Eastern Least) Honeyguide** *Indicator meliphilus* was seen at Ngangao forest patch, Taita Hills on 26 December 1997; the first record for Taita. **Friedmann's Lark** *Mirafra pulpa*, one of Africa's least known birds, first recorded in Tsavo West National Park on 28 November 1997, was observed singing for several weeks thereafter. In the first week of February 1998, c10 birds were singing near Lake Jipe, south-west of Tsavo. A singing **Common Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita* at Ngangao forest patch, Taita Hills on 8 February 1998 constitutes the first record of this scarce migrant for the Taita Hills and is near the southernmost limit of its normal wintering range. A **Wood Warbler** *P. sibilatrix* was at Mida Creek in March 1997. The first coastal **Black-and-White Flycatcher** *Bias musicus* in 40 years was recorded at Shimoni in October 1997 during the World BirdWatch. The extremely local and scarce **Red-naped Bush-shrike** *Laniarius ruficeps* was observed by the main road near Voi on 11 February 1998. A **Southern Grosbeak Canary** *Serinus (donaldsoni) buchani* was just west of Ngong Hills on 4 October 1997 (*all per CP*). The alleged second **Northern Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus* for Kenya, reported from the Sabaki River estuary (*Bull. ABC* 5: 73) appears to have been the same individual as recorded in February 1995 (*Scopus* 19: 113–114). It stayed in the area for about 18 months and was seen by many local and overseas birders (*DT*).

### Madagascar

Records from November–December 1997 include the following. A female **Slender-billed Flufftail** *Sarothrura watersi* responded to playback and was flushed twice from an area near Périnet on 20 November. A **Lesser Sand Plover** *Charadrius mongolus* was observed at Maroansetra on 22 November (*AR, JR*). A **Little Stint** *Calidris minuta* was at salt pans south of the Mora Mora hotel, Ifaty on 30 November (*CB, MH, DR, MR*). A **Scaly**



Red-necked Phalarope  
*Phalaropus lobatus* by Mark Andrews

**Ground Roller** *Brachypteracias squamiger* was seen at Mantady on 21 November (AR, JR). A **Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica*, a rare migrant in Madagascar, was seen 70 km north-west of Antananarivo on 15 November and another at la Mangrove, 15 km south of Tulear, on 1 December. Two **Red-tailed Newtonia** *Newtonia fanovanae* were reported at Perinet on 23 November; this species is only known from a single specimen collected in 1931 and a number of sight records in the 1990s. A male of the recently described **Red-shouldered Vanga** *Calicalicus rufocarpalis* was seen along the St Augustin road on 15 November (CB, MH, DR, MR). Records from 23–25 November from the Masoala Peninsula include a **Madagascar Serpent Eagle** *Eutriorchis astur* at Andranobe, **Bernier's Vanga** *Oriolia bernieri*, two **Helmet Vanga** *Euryceros prevostii* on nests, and adult **Dusky Greenbul** *Phyllastrephus tenebrosus* (*Bernieria tenebrosa*) with juveniles (AR, JR).

## Madeira

A first-winter and a second-winter **Ring-billed Gull** *Larus delawarensis* were seen at Funchal on 10 February; the first-winter was seen again on 14th, while another first-winter was at Machico on 13th. A first-winter **Glaucous Gull** *L. hyperboreus* was at Caniçal on 13 February (MT per *Birding World* 11: 92).

## Morocco

Oued Massa held single adult **Black-throated Divers** *Gavia arctica* on 23 December 1997 (SM, GV) and on 28 February 1998 (CBn), a single **Great Northern Diver** *Gavia immer* on 21 January and two on 6 February. More than 100 **European Storm Petrels** *Hydrobates pelagicus* were seen at Agadir Harbour on 5 February (VA, SH, AW per *Birding World* 11: 50–52), and a **Madeiran Storm Petrel** *Oceanodroma castro* was spotted off Moulay Bouselham on 20 December 1997 (VA; GV per *Birdwatch* 70: 64–65). At Lake Merzouga, 190 **Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea* were present on 24 March (WW per *Birding World* 11: 93) and 360 on 9 April (HD, TJ per *Birding World* 11: 137), while at Oued Massa single drake **Green-winged Anas** (*crecca*) *carolinensis* and **Blue-winged Teals** *A. discors* were seen on 28 February (CBn). Lac du Sidi Bour Haba held more than 200 **Marbled Duck** *Marmaronetta angustirostris* on 30 December 1997 (SM, GV). A drake **Ring-necked Duck**



Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor*  
by Craig Robson

*Aythya collaris* was observed at Barrage Hassan Addakhill, Al-Rashida, on 25 January (VA, SH, AW per *Birding World* 11: 50). A **Griffon Vulture** *Gyps fulvus* flew over 28 km north of Marrakech on 5 April (HD, TJ per *Birding World* 11: 137). Several cranes were recorded at Oued Massa: a **Baillon's Crane** *Porzana pusilla* on 10 February (VA, SH, AW per *Birding World* 11: 52), seven **Spotted Crane** *P. porzana* on 28 February (CBn) and three on 28 March, with two **Little Crane** *P. parva* also on 28 February (WW per *Birding World* 11: 93) and at least 12 along 1 km of river on 16 April. A **Marsh Sandpiper** *Tringa stagnatilis* stayed at Oued Sous on at least 14–17 April. Also there were a first-summer and two adult **Sabine's Gull** *Larus sabini* on 17 and 20 April respectively, and a second-winter **Ring-billed Gull** *L. delawarensis* also on 17 April (HD, TJ per *Birding World* 11: 137). Over 100 **Pomarine Skuas** *Stercorarius pomarinus* flew past Dakhla on 9 February, and 104 and six **Royal Terns** *Sterna maxima* at 18 km and 60 km south of Dakhla during 7–9 February (VA, SH, AW per *Birding World* 11: 52). Up to three **Laughing Doves** *Streptopelia senegalensis* were in Ait Youl village, south-west of El Kelaa, on 12–13 February (VA, SH, AW per *Birding World* 11: 50–52). At Merja Zerga 28 **Marsh Owls** *Asio capensis* were seen on 29 December 1997 (SM, GV). Two **Richard's Pipits** *Anthus (novaeseelandiae) richardi* were discovered at Oued Massa on 21 January (VA, SH, AW per *Birding World* 11: 50–52). The first **Desert Warbler** *Sylvia nana* for the Souss-Massa National Park was seen on 25 March (CBn). **Desert Sparrow** *Passer simplex* continues to be regularly seen at its well-known site at Merzouga: more than 50 were present on 28 December 1997 (SM, GV) and at least 21 on 24 March (WW per *Birding World* 11: 93). An exceptional flock of c130 **Ortolan Buntings** *Emberiza*

*bortolana* was seen in the Sous valley 5 km south of Aoulouz on 14 April (HD, TJ per *Birding World* 11: 137).

## Namibia

A **Sooty Falcon** *Falco concolor* was seen at Halali, Etosha National Park on 23 January; this constitutes the fourth or fifth record for the country, with at least two of these being from Etosha (AT). A **Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra* was observed in the Huab River valley, Damaraland, on 11 April. A **Red-faced Crombec** *Sylvietta whytii* was discovered at Lianshulu Lodge, Mudumu National Park, East Caprivi, on 21 April; there are no records for Namibia in the recently published *Southern African Bird Atlas* (ID).

## Nigeria

Good views of an **American Golden Plover** *Pluvialis dominica* in the company of **Grey Plovers** *P. squatarola* were obtained at Old Ikoyi Park, Lagos on 5–6 April 1998 (GE, SMn, PW). A similar (and presumably the same) bird was found at exactly the same place in November 1997 (PH per PW).

## Seychelles

Notable sightings from the second half of 1997 include the following. A **Purple Heron** *Ardea purpurea* was at La Passe, Silhouette from 25–30 October and a **Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta* was at the same location on 26 October and 19 November. A **Northern Shoveler** *Anas clypeata* on Bird Island on 22–23 October was the islands' fifth record. A **Broad-billed Sandpiper** *Limicola falcinellus* at Baie St Anne, Praslin on 19 October was the third record for Seychelles and the first adult, earlier sightings being of first-winter birds. The **Watercock** *Gallinix cinerea* reported to Seychelles Bird Records Committee (SBRC) and listed in *Bull. ABC* 5: 74 proved to be an **Allen's Gallinule** *Porphyryula alleni*, a second record for Seychelles. Reports received by SBRC for the first half of 1998 include a **Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca* at Police Bay, Mahé on 26 May 1998, a first report for Seychelles. Two **Purple Heron**, a rare vagrant, were noted at this same location on the same date. A **Little Swift** *Apus affinis* at Aride Island on 16 November 1997 and a **Black-necked Grebe** *Podiceps nigricollis* at Platte Island from 8–10 December 1997 were second reports for these species. Other noteworthy sightings included a **Black Kite** *Milvus migrans*

sighted on Cousin Island and Silhouette Island on 25 December 1997 (probably the same bird) and a **Black-headed Gull** *Larus ridibundus* at Océangate mudflats, Mahé on 30 January 1998 (*all AS*).

## South Africa

A **Red-throated Pipit** *Anthus cervinus* at Umvoti River Mouth, KwaZulu-Natal on 2–3 January, was the second record for South Africa (*AR, JR*). A **Thrush Nightingale** *Luscinia luscinia* at Ndumu on 28 December 1997 was the first record for KwaZulu-Natal in recent times (*AR*). The first **Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* for South Africa stayed at Gamtoos river mouth, near Port Elizabeth, from 2 May to at least June and was shown on the local TV news. This constitutes the southernmost record by far of the species in Africa (see pp. 129–130). Also present at same time was a late **European Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus* (per *ID*).

## Tunisia

On 17 November 1997, a **Red-necked Grebe** *Podiceps grisegena* among **Black-necked Grebes** *P. nigricollis* and a late adult winter **Lesser Crested Tern** *Sterna bengalensis* were seen at Djerba (*Dutch Birding* 19: 302–305). Four **Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea* were on a lake at Jemna, north of Douz on 15 January, while two days later 15 were seen flying west near Chebika, Tozeur. Some 330 **Marbled Duck** *Marmaronetta angustirostris* were on a lake at Nouail, west of Douz, and 70 on a lake at Douz on 13 January (*DS, AH*), while 191 were counted at Sidi el Hani in the first half of February (*MF* per *Birding World* 11: 52). Two **Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca* were on Lake Gdیرهghoul, Tunis on 18 January, and a male **Pallid Harrier** *Circus macrourus* at Zarzine, Douz on 13th (*DS, AH*). In the first half of February, 22 **Marsh Sandpipers** *Tringa stagnatilis* were at Thyna Salinas (*MF* per *Birding World* 11: 52). On the edge of Chott El Fejjaj, 30 km north of Kebili, 150 **Thick-billed Lark** *Rhamphocoris clotbey* were observed on 16 January, and 10 **Desert Sparrow** *Passer simplex* on 13th (*DS, AH*).

## Zambia

Records from June–December 1997 include the following. Several over-staying migrants were recorded during the austral winter. An immature **Steppe Eagle** *Aquila nipalensis* was

seen on several occasions in the Livingstone area and **White Storks** *Ciconia ciconia* were found at a few localities in June, July and August. Almost all of the latter were on irrigated winter wheat fields—a comparatively recent crop in Zambia which seems to provide ideal habitat for this species and which may have encouraged more immature birds to forego their migration. Unseasonal **Black Coucals** *Centropus grillii* were noted in several places between July and September, and a **Pygmy Kingfisher** *Ceyx picta* was near Kafue for much of August. A few 'dry birds' were recorded straying into the far south of the country in June and July, such as a **Tit-babbler** *Parisoma subcaerulea*, a **Red-eyed Bulbul** *Pycnonotus nigricans* and a number of **Purple Rollers** *Coracias naevia*, and in the far north-west, **Splendid Starlings** *Lamprolornis splendidus* were noted as early as June. A substantial and prolonged flood on the Kafue Flats resulted in a good breeding season for waterbirds, and in the July census high counts included 2,000+ **Reed Cormorants** *Phalacrocorax africanus* and 1,000+ **Whiskered Terns** *Chlidonias hybridus* at Lochinvar National Park. Also there were 10 **Slaty Egrets** *Egretta vinaceigula*, the first recorded in Zambia for over two years, and encouragingly, most seemed to be young birds. In August, several species were found beyond the limits of their known distribution. A **Black-backed Barbet** *Lybius minor* was seen several times near a potential nest site south-east of Lusaka and nearby was a long-staying **White-browed Sparrow-Weaver** *Plocepasser mahali*, a very unusual sight at such altitude. Near Kafue, a **Scaly-throated Honeyguide** *Indicator variegatus* called for a few weeks, and in Mwinilunga, the rarely witnessed 'winnowing' display of **Eastern Least Honeyguide** *Indicator meliphilus* was watched. Also in Mwinilunga in August was a wandering **White-bellied Sunbird** *Nectarinia talatala*. Near Livingstone, a **Kori Bustard** *Ardeotis kori*, a potential addition to the Zambian list, was twice watched flying into Zambian territory and on one occasion it landed. In September, a trip to find and explore forests in western Zambezi District produced a number of interesting range extensions, such as **Bannerman's Sunbird** *Nectarinia bannermani* and **Cinnamon Dove** *Aplopelia larvata*. **Grimwood's**

**Longclaw** *Macronyx grumwoodi* was also discovered in the same area. In October, over 2,000 **Black-tailed Godwits** *Limosa limosa* were counted in Lochinvar National Park, by far the highest number ever recorded of a species unknown in Zambia until 1972. Also there were at least 200 **Black-winged Pratincoles** *Glareola nordmanni* mixed in with 1,000s of **Common Pratincoles** *G. pratincola*; it seems as if this species has been overlooked in the past. In November and December, scarce Palearctic migrants recorded included at least three **Olive-tree Warblers** *Hippolais olivetorum*, several **European Nightjars** *Caprimulgus europaeus*, two **Corn Crakes** *Crex crex* and high numbers of **European Reed Warblers** *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*. What must have been the same **Franklin's Gull** *Larus pipixcan* last seen in January returned to Lochinvar in November (all per *PL*). ☞

Records were collated by Ron Demey from contributions supplied by Vaughan Ashby/Birdfinders (VA), C. Bell (CB), Max Berlin (MB), Svend Bodker (SB), Nik Borrow/Birdquest (NB), Chris Bowden (CBn), Tony Clarke/Canarian Nature Tours (TC), Ian Davidson (ID), John DeMarco (JDM), Robert Douseit (RD), Françoise Douseit-Lemaire (FDL), Hugues Dufourny (HD), Erik Ejermo (EE), Gus Ezealor (GE), Michael Funch (MF), Seppo Haavisto (SH), Phil Hall (PH), Allen Holmes (AH), M. Hunter (MH), Colin Jackson (CJ), Lamarana Jallow (LJ), Torkild Jensen (TJ), Pete Leonard (PL), Shiiwua Manu (SMn), Steve Mawby (SM), Barry Mitchell (BM), Ray Moyle (RM), Ron Overton (RO), Adam Riley (AR), D. Ross (DR), Jonathan Rossouw (JR), M. Roxby (MR), Valéry Schollaert (VS), David Simpson/Branta (DS), Eduardo Garcia del Rey/Aves Ecotours (ER), Adrian Skerrett/Seychelles Bird Records Committee (AS), Antony Tebbitt (AT), Clive Toll (CT), Domingo Trujillo (DT), Ron Turner (DT), Mick Turton (MT), Gábor Vasuta (GV), Jan Vermeulen (JV), Will Wagstaff/Travelling Naturalists (WW), Colin Walters (CW), Andy Warren (AW), David Waters (DW), Pete Wood (PW), Steve Young (SY) and from Birding World, Birdwatch and Dutch Birding.

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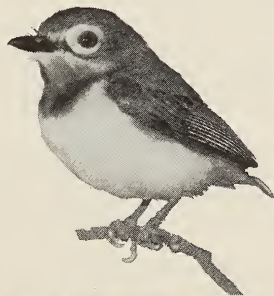
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